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ELIZABETH
BAKER

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CHAINS

CHAINS: A PLAY, IN FOUR ACTS, BY ELIZABETH BAKER

LONDON: SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
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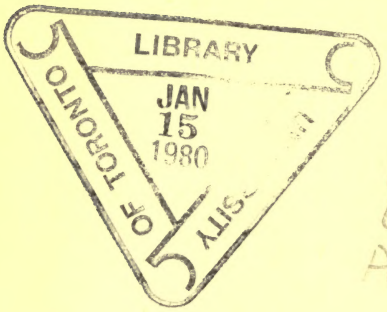

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First Impression, January 1911
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CHAINS

ACT I

SCENE: Sitting-room at 55 Acacia Avenue. The principal articles of furniture are the centre table, set for dinner for three, and a sideboard on the right. There are folding doors at the back, leading to the front room, partly hidden by curtains; on the left a low French window leading into the garden. On the right is a fire burning; and above it a door into the kitchen.

The furniture of the room is a little mixed in style. A wicker armchair is on one side of the fireplace, a folding carpet-chair on the other. The other chairs, three at the table and two against the walls, are of bent wood. The sideboard is mahogany. The carpet-square over oilcloth is of an indeterminate pattern in subdued colours, dull crimson predominating. Lace curtains at window. Family photographs, a wedding group and a cricket group, and a big lithograph copy of a Marcus Stone picture, are on the walls. There is a brass alarm clock on the mantelpiece and one or two ornaments. A sewing-machine stands on a small table near the window; and on the edge of this table and on the small table on the other side of the window are pots of cuttings. A couple of bookshelves hang over the machine. A small vase of flowers stands in the centre of the dinner table.

LILY WILSON, *much worried, is laying the centre*

table. She is a pretty, slight woman, obviously young, wearing a light cotton blouse, dark skirt and big pinafore. The front door is heard to close. CHARLEY WILSON *enters. He is an ordinary specimen of the city clerk, dressed in correct frock-coat, dark trousers, carefully creased, much cuff and a high collar.*

LILY. Here you are, then. [*She puts up her face and they kiss hurriedly.*] Did I hear Mr. Tennant with you?

CHAR. Met on the step.

LILY. *How* funny! Well, that's nice. We can have dinner almost directly.

CHAR. [*putting down his hat carefully on sideboard, and stretching himself slowly, with evident enjoyment.*] Saturday, thank the Lord!

LILY. [*laughing prettily.*] Poor thing!

CHAR. [*looking at his silk hat.*] I should like to pitch the beastly thing into the river. [*He shakes his fist at it. Then he stretches his neck as if to lift it out of the collar and shaking down his cuffs till he can get a fine view of them, regards them meditatively.*] Pah!

LILY. [*anxiously.*] What's the matter with them? Are they scorched?

CHAR. Scorched! No, they're white enough. Beastly uniform!

LILY. But you must wear cuffs, dear.

CHAR. A chap came to the office to-day in a red tie. Old Raffles had him up, and pitched into him. Asked him if he was a Socialist. Chap said he wasn't, but liked red. "So do I," says the Boss, "but I don't wear a golf coat in the city!" Thought he was awfully smart, and it did make Poppy swear.

LILY. Who's Poppy, dear.

CHAR. Popperwell. He almost left there and then. Said he should wear whatever tie he liked.

LILY. It would have been rather silly of him, wouldn't it? He's so sure there.

CHAR. That's what *he* said. He thought better of it and swallowed it. Well—dinner ready?

LILY. Waiting.

CHAR. [*going out.*] I'll be down in a jiffy.

LILY goes to the fire. TENNANT *heard outside whistling a bar of the song "Off to Philadelphia." He comes in. He is a broad-shouldered young fellow, a little shy in his manner with women.*

TENNANT. Nice day, Mrs. Wilson.

LILY. Beautiful.

TENNANT. I've brought you home the paper, if you'd like it. It's the "Daily Mirror."

LILY. Oh, thank you. I do like the pictures. Charley is getting so dreadfully serious now in his reading, and won't buy it. He takes the "Daily Telegraph." He thinks the gardening notes are so good.

TENNANT. He's luxurious. It's a penny.

LILY. Oh, he shares it with somebody. [*Pause.*]

TENNANT. How goes the garden?

LILY. It's rather trying—I should like to give up those peas and things, and have chickens. They would be so useful.

LILY *goes out.* TENNANT *takes a map out of his pocket and stands studying it.* CHARLEY *and* LILY *enter together.* CHARLEY *has made a wonderful change into a loose, rather creased suit of bright brown, flannel shirt with soft collar, flowing tie and old slippers. A pipe is sticking out of one pocket, and a newspaper out of the other. They sit down, and* LILY *tries not to look worried as* CHARLEY *laboriously cuts the small joint which she has brought in with her and put before him. He splashes the gravy a little and has to use the sharpener.* LILY *serves vegetables.*

CHAR. I think I shall get one of Robertson's pups.

LILY. It would be lovely.

CHAR. He's got one he'll let me have cheap.

TENNANT. I saw them last night. They're a good breed. Make fine house-dogs.

CHAR. That's what you want round here. A quiet neighbourhood like this is A 1 for burglars.

LILY. You don't think we shall have any, do you?

CHAR. No. 24 had 'em the other night.

TENNANT. What were they after?

LILY. 24? That's the new people. What a shame!

CHAR. Wanted the wedding presents.

LILY. And Mrs. Thompson told me they had real silver at 24.

CHAR. Trust the burglars for knowing that. They won't risk their skins for electro. So *we* shan't have 'em.

LILY. Charley! You forget the biscuit barrel and the tray.

TENNANT. Where's the Bobby?

LILY. There's only one about here.

CHAR. They don't have Bobbies for burgles in these sort of places, only for rows. And we don't have rows. We're too respectable.

LILY. I think it's so mean of burglars to come to people like us.

CHAR. [*with a burst of laughter.*] Let 'em go to Portman Square, you say?

LILY. Well, of course, it's wrong to steal at all; but it doesn't seem quite so bad. [*She stops, a little confused.*]

TENNANT. Of course it isn't.

CHAR. [*lying back comfortably in his chair.*] Going away Sunday?

TENNANT. No—the fact is—

LILY. Maggie is coming round this afternoon. Shall we ask the Leslies for whist to-night?

CHAR. All right. Don't make it too early, though. [*Looking out of the French windows into the garden.*] I've got to get in my peas.

TENNANT. Green peas?

CHAR. Green peas in that patch? My dear chap, don't I wish I could!

LILY. [*to* TENNANT.] Have some more?

TENNANT. No, thanks.

CHAR. For one thing, there's the soil! It's rotten. Then there're the sparrows. . . .

LILY. Some of them are so tame, dear, and they don't seem to care a bit for the cat next door.

CHAR. [*bitterly.*] They don't care for anything. I wish they'd take a fancy to a few snails.

LILY. They don't eat snails.

CHAR. You spoil 'em. She gives 'em soaked bread all through the winter, and then expects me to grow things. Lord!

LILY *collects plates.* TENNANT *goes out.* CHARLEY *lights pipe.* CHARLEY *goes to window, where he stands leaning against the post and smoking.*

LILY. The baby across the road is such a darling, Charley.

CHAR. Is it?

LILY. The girl was out with it this morning, and I called her over.

CHAR. What is it?

LILY. It's a boy.

CHARLEY'S *replies are without interest and he continues to gaze out into garden.*

They're going to call him Theodore Clement Freeman. It's rather a lot, isn't it?

CHAR. What's he got it all for?

LILY. After her father and his father and Freeman is a family name.

CHAR. What did they want to give 'em all to *him* for? They should keep some for the next.

LILY. Charley!

CHAR. It's silly. Still, it's their business.

LILY. It might be a girl.

CHAR. Well—there's the others.

LILY. Charley!

CHAR. My dear girl, why not?

LILY. I don't like you to speak like that.

CHAR. I— [*Stops suddenly, looks at her, and comes over. He takes her face between his hands.*] You silly! [*Kisses her.*]

LILY *goes out with a tray of things singing.* CHARLEY *rolls up his sleeves and goes into the garden.*

TENNANT *comes in and looks round.* CHARLEY *comes to the window with a spade.*

TENNANT. You—er—busy?

CHAR. [*lighting his pipe.*] Um! Want a job? There's a nice little lot of squirming devils under that flower-pot that want killing. Take your time over it.

TENNANT. Thanks. My fancy doesn't lie in gardening.

CHAR. Filthy soil, this.

TENNANT. Mrs. Wilson would like to keep chickens.

CHAR. Not if I know it! I'd rather go into a flat. [*Leaning against the door and smoking thoughtfully.*] I could chuck the lot sometimes. These two-penny-halfpenny back yards make me sick.

Pause.

I'd give something for a piece of good land. Something to pay you for your labour. [*Rousing.*] Well—going out?

TENNANT. [*uneasily.*] Yes—presently.

CHAR. [*turning to look at him.*] What's up?

TENNANT. I've er—got some news for you.

CHAR. Anything wrong?

TENNANT. No—no! The fact is—I'm going to hook it.

CHAR. [*astonished.*] Hook it? Where to?

TENNANT. I'm sick of the whole show. I can't stand it any longer.

CHAR. [*trying to realise the situation.*] Do you mean you've left Molesey's?

TENNANT. Yes. I'm going to leave England—and so, you see, I've got to leave here—your place.

CHAR. Leave England? Got a crib?

TENNANT. No, nothing.

CHAR. What are you going for then?

TENNANT. Because I'm sick of it.

CHAR. So am I, and so are others. Do you mean you are just going out because you want a change?

TENNANT. That's about it. I've had enough of grind.

CHAR. Well, perhaps you'll get grind somewhere else.

TENNANT. It'll be a change of grind then. That's something.

CHAR. Canada?

TENNANT. No, Australia.

CHAR. Phew! That's a long shot. Got any friends there?

TENNANT. No.

CHAR. It's a bit risky, isn't it?

TENNANT. Of course it's risky. But who wouldn't have a little risk instead of that beastly hole every day for years? Scratch, scratch, scratch, and nothing in the end, mind you?

CHAR. [*ironically.*] You might become a junior partner.

TENNANT. [*ignoring the remark.*] Suppose I stay there. They'll raise the screw every year till I get what they think is enough for me. Then you just stick. I suppose I should marry and have a little house somewhere, and grind on.

CHAR. [*looking round.*] Like me.

LILY *heard singing off R.*

TENNANT. No offence, old chap. It's all right for some. It suits you. You're used to it. I want to see things a bit before I settle.

CHARLEY *is silent. His pipe has gone out and he is staring at the floor.*

So I thought I'd go the whole plunge. I've got a little cash, of course, so I shan't starve at first, anyhow.

CHARLEY *makes no remark.* TENNANT *becomes apologetic.*

I'm—I feel a bit of a beast—but the fact is—I—it was decided in a hurry—I—er—

CHARLEY *looks up.*

I'm going on Monday.

CHAR. On Monday! Why, that's the day after to-morrow.

TENNANT. Yes, I know. It was like this. I heard of a man who's going Monday—a man I know—and it came over me all at once, why shouldn't I go too? I went to see him Friday—kept it dark here till I'd seen the guv'nor, and now it's all fixed. I'm awfully sorry to have played you like this—

CHAR. Oh, rot! That's nothing. But I say, it's the rummest go I ever heard of. What did Molesey say?

TENNANT. Slapped me on the back! What d'ye think of that? I thought he'd call me a fool. He pointed out that I could stay there for ever, if I liked—which was jolly decent of him—but when I said I'd rather not, thanks muchly, he banged me on the back,

and said he wished he could do the same and cut the office. He didn't even stop the money for notice.

CHAR. Did he give you a £5 note?

TENNANT. [*laughing.*] You don't want much. The old chap was quite excited, asked me to write—how's that?

Pause.

[*Rising.*] The thing is—I can't see why I didn't go before. Why did I ever go into the beastly office? There was nobody to stop me going to Timbuctoo, if I liked. I say, will you tell Mrs. Wilson?

CHAR. She's only in the kitchen. Lil!—Lil! [*Shouting.*]

LILY. [*from outside.*] Yes, dear.

CHAR. Come here! Here's news.

LILY *enters, wiping her hands on her pinafore and smiling.*

LILY. Yes?

CHAR. [*waving his pipe towards* TENNANT.] What d'ye think *he's* going to do?

LILY. [*studying* TENNANT *seriously.*] Do? How—

TENNANT. [*nervously.*] I—I'm going to leave you, Mrs. Wilson.

LILY. To leave us? [*With enlightenment.*] You're going to be married!

TENNANT. Good Heavens, no! Not that!

CHAR. Whatever made you think of that?

LILY. What else could he do?

TENNANT. I'm going abroad.

Going over to garden door.

CHAR. He's going to seek his fortune. Lucky dog!

LILY. Have you got a good appointment, Mr. Tennant?

TENNANT. No, nothing. I'm going on the chance.

LILY. Whatever for? Didn't you like Molesey's?

TENNANT. Oh, they were good enough and all that, but I got sick of the desk. I'm going farming.

LILY. And throwing up a good situation?

TENNANT. I suppose you'd call it good.

LILY. It was so sure. You'd have been head clerk in time. I'm sure you would. It does seem such a pity.

TENNANT. Sounds a bit foolish, I expect.

LILY. Of course you must get tired of it sometimes. But to throw it up altogether! I do hope you won't be sorry for it. Charley gets tired of it sometimes—don't you, dear?

CHAR. [*from the garden door.*] Just a bit—now and then.

LILY. Everybody does I expect. It would be very nice, of course, to see other places and all that—but you can always travel in your holidays.

CHAR. How far on the Continong can you go in a fortnight, Lil?

TENNANT. I don't think you quite understand. It isn't so much that I want to see things—though that'd be jolly—but I want a change of work.

LILY. [*sympathetically.*] It *is* trying to do the same thing over and over again. But then the hours are not so very long, are they?

CHAR. Nine to six, with an hour for lunch and tea thrown in. Count your many blessings, Freddy.

LILY. [*reproachfully, and crossing to him.*] You know, Charley, we've often talked it over, and you've said how regular the hours were.

CHAR. So they are.

CHARLEY *disappears for a moment into garden, but is now and again to be seen outside the door with a flower-pot or some other thing for the garden.*

LILY. And you have the evenings, and they give you Saturday morning at Molesey's as you get on, don't they?

TENNANT. Yes, it's all true, Mrs. Wilson—but I can't stand it. Anybody can have the job.

CHAR. It's the spring, Freddy. That's the matter with you.

LILY. I do hope you won't be sorry for it. It would be so dreadful if you failed, after giving up such a good situation. Of course we are very sorry to lose you, Mr. Tennant—you have been so kind.

TENNANT. [*hastily and with much embarrassment.*] Oh, please don't.

LILY. And we have always got on so very well together. I'm sure it will be very difficult to get anyone to suit us so well again. But you won't forget us and if we have your address, we can write sometimes—

CHAR. And if anything striking occurs, I'll send a cable. The novelty will be worth it. [*Coming just inside the door with the spade in his hand.*] For the rest, I'll describe one day and you can tick it off for the whole lot of the others. Rise at 7, breakfast; catch the 8.30, City—

The door-bell is heard.

Who on earth—!

He goes into the garden.

LILY. Maggie, I expect.

She goes out.

TENNANT, *after making a step towards the garden, turns to the door, only to meet* MAGGIE MASSEY *and* LILY. MAGGIE *is of medium height, well-proportioned, good-looking without being pretty.*

MAGGIE. [*shaking hands with* TENNANT.] How do you do?

LILY. What *do* you think, Maggie? Mr. Tennant is going to leave us. Guess what for!

MAGGIE. He's going to be married?

CHAR. Good Lord! There's another.

MAGGIE. Hullo, Charles, you there!

LILY. He's going to leave England.

MAGGIE. How nice for him!

LILY. [*emphatically.*] Nice! But he's got nothing to do there!

MAGGIE. [*to* TENNANT.] Are you going to emigrate?

TENNANT. Yes; I'm going to Australia to try my luck.

CHAR. Isn't he an idiot?

MAGGIE. Do you think so?

CHAR. Throwing up a nice snug little place at Molesey's and rushing himself on to the already overstocked labour market of the Colonies.

MAGGIE. You are really going on your luck?

TENNANT. Yes.

MAGGIE. How fine!

LILY. Maggie! Think of the risk!

MAGGIE. He's a man. It doesn't matter.

LILY. If he'd been out of work, it would have been so very different.

MAGGIE. That would have spoilt the whole thing. I admire his pluck.

LILY. Well, he's got no one depending on him, so he will suffer alone.

MAGGIE. You're not very encouraging, Lil. I have heard of a married man doing the same.

CHAR. [*quickly.*] Who was that?

LILY. How very foolish!

MAGGIE. Oh, he was already out of work.

LILY. That is different—although even then—

MAGGIE. His wife went to live with her people again and he went out to the Colonies and made a home for her.

LILY. [*sceptically.*] How did he do that?

MAGGIE. I don't know. *You* are quite free to do as you like, aren't you, Mr. Tennant? How does that feel?

TENNANT. I have only just started to think about it. Directly the idea came into my head, off I had to go.

CHARLEY, *who has stood listening, turns slowly and walks away.*

MAGGIE. You are lucky to have found it out in time.

TENNANT. In time?

MAGGIE. Before you got too old to do anything.

Pause.

CHAR. [*near the garden window but outside.*] Climb on to the dustbin, only mind the lid's on tight.

TENNANT. That's Leslie coming over. I'll go. [*goes.*]

Enter from the garden MORTON LESLIE, *a big fair man, clean-shaven, lazy and good-natured.* CHARLEY *follows.*

LESLIE. I nearly smashed your husband, Mrs. Wilson . . . Good day, Miss Maggie—and I'm sure I've absolutely killed Mr. Wilson's beans.

CHAR. If you don't the birds will—and if they don't the worms will—and—how can you expect anything to grow in that garden?

LESLIE. I thought it was such an excellent Small Holding! What about the carrots?

CHAR. Pah! Carrots! Why not peaches? Come on, Leslie! I've got the papers in the other room.

CHARLEY *lifts the curtain and they go into front room.*

LILY. I'm afraid Charley must be tired. He seems quite irritable.

MAGGIE. So am I when I get home from business. [*Throwing out her arms and smiling at* LILY.] No more shop for me in a month or two, Lil.

LILY. [*excitedly.*] You're going to marry Mr. Foster?

MAGGIE *nods.*

Oh, how lovely! How nice for you, dear! I am so glad. What did mother say?

MAGGIE. [*with a little laugh.*] Mother is charmed.

LILY. Everybody is, of course. He is such a nice man. He will spoil you, Maggie. You lucky girl!

MAGGIE. Yes, I suppose I am.

LILY. You don't like to show it, of course, dear.

MAGGIE. Don't I? You should have seen me last night! I took off my shop collar and apron and put them on the floor and danced on them—till mother came to see what was the matter.

LILY. You *must* be fond of him, dear.

MAGGIE. No, I'm *not,* particularly.

LILY. Maggie!

MAGGIE. [*walking up and down.*] That's funny now. I didn't mean to say that. It just came. [*A pause.*] How queer! [*A pause.*] Well, it's the truth, anyway. At least, it's not quite true. When I came here to-day I was awfully happy about it—I am fond of him at least—I—well—he's very nice—you know. [*Irritably.*] What did you want to start this for, Lil?

LILY. [*aggrieved.*] *I* start it? I did nothing.

MAGGIE. I was so satisfied when I came.

LILY. [*soothingly and taking her sister's hat and coat from her.*] You're a little tired, dear. We'll have an early cup of tea. Have you got your ring, dear?

MAGGIE *holds out her left hand.*

How sweet! Sapphires! He must be rich, Maggie.

Pause.

MAGGIE. I wish I was a good housekeeper, Lil.

LILY. [*reassuring.*] Oh, you'll soon learn, dear; and his other housekeeper wasn't very good.

MAGGIE. I wasn't thinking of that.

LILY. But you talked of housekeeping, dear.

MAGGIE. Yes, but that's quite different from being married. If I could cook decently, I would have left the shop before.

LILY. But you *are* going to leave the shop!

MAGGIE. [*unheeding.*] Or if I understood anything about the house properly, but I couldn't be even a mother's help unless I could wash.

LILY. I don't know what you mean, Maggie. You haven't got to wash. You know Mr. Foster can afford to send it all out. [*Sighing enviously.*] That must be nice.

MAGGIE. I heard of a girl the other day, Fanny White—you know her—she's gone to Canada.

LILY. Canada! Who's talking about Canada? What's that to do—?

MAGGIE. I was envious. She used to be with us at the shop.

LILY. [*impatiently.*] Yes, I know. Well, you've done better than she, anyway, Maggie, if she *is* going to Canada. She'll only be a servant, after all. What else can she do? And then in the end she'll marry some farmer man and have to work fearfully hard—I've heard about the women over there—and wish she had *never* left England. While here are you, going to marry a rich man who's *devoted* to you, with plenty of money and long holidays, and your own servant to begin with! Really, Maggie—!

MAGGIE. [*stretching a little and smiling.*] Isn't it gorgeous? [*shaking herself.*] Well—it must be Mr. Tennant's fault. He shouldn't get mad ideas into his head—

LILY. And he really is mad. Throwing up a most *excellent* situation. My dear, I call him just stupid!

CHARLEY. [*lifting the curtain and coming forward with Leslie.*] There's no hurry.

LESLIE. Oh, I'll start on it to-night. My wife's gone away and left me for the day, and I'm a forsaken grass widower.

LILY. [*laughing.*] Poor Mr. Leslie! Won't you come in here to-night? Don't you think it would be

very nice, Charley, as Mr. Tennant is going so soon—

LESLIE. Tennant? Where's he going?

MAGGIE. *You'll* never guess.

LESLIE. He's leaving you? He's going to get married?

CHAR. [*impatiently.*] You're as bad as a woman!

MAGGIE. I thought you more brilliant, Mr. Leslie.

LESLIE. I thought of the happiest thing that could happen to a man, Miss Maggie.

LILY. No, it's not marrying. He's going abroad.

LESLIE. Got a fortune?

MAGGIE. He's just going to try his luck. He's emigrating.

LESLIE. What a fool! He's got the sack, I suppose?

MAGGIE. No. He's thrown it up.

LESLIE. Thrown up a safe job? Oh, he's an ass, a stupid ass! You surely don't ask me to come and wish good luck to an ass?

MAGGIE. You can help with a dirge then.

LESLIE. Much more like it. But, I say, is it really true? He must have got something to go to?

CHAR. He hasn't. He's got a little cash, of course. He's always been a careful beast.

LESLIE. And he's going to throw it away! And then I suppose he'll be out of work over there, and we shall be hearing of the unemployment in the Colonies! It's just this sort of thing that makes a man a Conservative. It's what I call getting off the ladder and deliberately kicking it down.

CHAR. Well, I don't then. I think he's a lucky chap to be able to do something he likes. He's got some pluck.

LILY. Why, dear, you know you think it's very silly of him!

LESLIE. [*laughing.*] You must look after your hus-

band, Mrs. Wilson, I can see. He'll be running away. Well, so long, old chap! I'll come back later. Just give me a hitch over the wall. You'll be sorry about those beans next week. [*Pause.*]

They go out. A crash is heard.

CHAR. Hullo! What's up?

LESLIE. [*in the distance.*] Smashed a box of tomato plants. Phew!

LILY, *laughing, goes out with* MAGGIE.

A long whistle—CHARLEY *comes back into the room and stands looking into the fire. Pause.*

Enter TENNANT *R.*

TENNANT. I'm just going round to Carter's. Anything you want? [*Pause.*] I suppose Leslie had something to say about me?

CHAR. He doesn't want to come *with* you.

TENNANT *laughs.*

You don't seem to know much about it, but I suppose you've fixed on a town. Sydney?

TENNANT. No, Brisbane. [*Pulling out a map.*] The chap I know is cattle raising. Look!

He opens the map on the table: they both lean over it, CHARLEY'S *burnt-out pipe still in his hand.*

We're going to Brisbane, then this way [*moving his finger*] across Queensland. He knows something at Merivale—here—see—in the Darling district. Then we shall push on to Maronoa—that's the county—we're going to a tiny place—Terramoa—but of course I mayn't get anything—

CHAR. [*who is practically lying over the map.*] Not fruit-farming then? That's more my line.

TENNANT. No. If ever you thought of that—see—this is a good district—I heard of a man there once—see—this way—Ship to Sydney—Vineyards and all sorts—suit you.

CHARLEY. U-m! Or one could go this way. [*Pointing with his pipe.*]

LILY'S *voice heard calling "Charley"*—TENNANT *stands upright.*

LILY. [*enters—laughing.*] Charley! What are you doing?

CHARLEY *jumps up and* TENNANT *folds up the map.*

Looking at the plans?

TENNANT. I'm off.

Goes out.

LILY. Finished gardening already, dear?

CHARLEY. [*putting on his coat.*] Don't feel like it.

LILY. [*holding out a newspaper.*] Look here, dear, this will do for us, I think.

CHARLEY. [*glancing round.*] What is it?

LILY. An advertisement. [*Reading.*] "Wanted, by Young Man, board—residence in quiet family within easy reach of city. Western suburb preferred." I must answer it.

CHARLEY. I say—give Tennant a chance to get out first.

LILY. But he is going, dear, so there's no risk. And it's such a good chance. Besides, we can ask Mr. Tennant for a reference.

CHARLEY. [*sharply.*] No, don't. Surely we can exist a week without anybody.

LILY. Oh, yes! Only I thought—it's a pity to miss—You don't want Mr. Tennant to go, do you, dear? He is nice company for you.

CHARLEY. He's a nice chap. But you needn't get lodgers to keep me company.

LILY. [*laughs.*] What an idea! Of course not.

CHARLEY. [*going to her and turning her face towards him.*] I say, Lil, aren't you ever dull here?

LILY. No—well—hardly ever. There's always something to do. What a question!

CHARLEY. Don't you ever get sick of it? It's jolly hard work sometimes. [*He takes her hands and looks at them, stroking them as if unconsciously.*] Why they're getting quite rough. [*She pulls them away.*]

LILY. It's the washing, dear. It does roughen your hands.

CHARLEY. [*taking them again and kissing them.*] They weren't rough when we married.

LILY. [*she turns away.*] You silly boy, of course they weren't. I never did washing at home. What do you think, dear? Maggie is going to be married.

CHARLEY. [*with little interest.*] To Foster?

LILY. Yes. Isn't she lucky? He's quite well off.

CHARLEY. So *she* won't do the washing. I shall never be rich.

LILY. You'll be head clerk one of these days.

CHARLEY. One of these days!

LILY. And then we'll have a servant.

CHARLEY. Perhaps I shall never be head clerk.

LILY. Oh, yes, you will!

CHARLEY. I don't know that I'm excited at the idea —a sort of policeman over the other chaps. I'd rather be as I am.

LILY. But think of the position—and the money!

CHARLEY *nods gloomily—he walks to garden door.* Where's your ambition, dear?

CHARLEY. Perfectly safe. No fear of that getting lost. The man who built that road [*pointing out of the window*] ought to be hanged.

LILY. They're not very pretty, those houses. Mrs. Freeman told me this morning that they're going to raise our rents a little.

CHARLEY. [*turning round sharply.*] What? *That's*

because they've brought the fares down. Just like 'em.

LILY. I was thinking this morning, dear, that perhaps we could take two boarders. It would help a little. That little room at the back, over the scullery, would do nicely with a single bed.

CHARLEY. That's where I keep my cuttings and things.

LILY. Yes, dear, but you could have half the coal shed. We never fill it.

CHARLEY. I don't want the coal shed. I say—must we have two?

LILY. It would make things better, dear.

CHARLEY. But it's beastly, choking up your house with a lot of fellers. *You* don't like it, do you?

LILY. No, dear, of course not.

CHARLEY. You don't seem much put out.

LILY. It's no good being cross about it, dear, is it? If it's got to be done, we may as well make the best of it.

CHARLEY. Oh, make the best of it. [*Fretfully.*] You might at least seem vexed.

LILY. [*patiently.*] Of course I don't like it, dear, and of course I'd much rather be alone with you and have all my house to myself—though really the boarders don't worry much, you know. They are always home late and only have meals with us.

CHARLEY. Who wants 'em at meals? I don't, if you do!

LILY. [*pathetically.*] You are very unkind. I never said I wanted them. I'm only doing my best to make things smooth. You might help me, Charley. [*She turns away.*]

CHARLEY. [*crossing to Lily and patting her on her hand.*] I'll be all right later. But I say it is a bit thick. An Englishman's home is his castle. I like that! Why, the only place where you can be alone is

the bedroom. We'll be letting that next. [*He laughs sarcastically.*]

LILY. [*shocked.*] Charley! What are you saying?

CHARLEY. Ha, ha, what a joke! The—well, never mind. The day we let the bathroom, Lil—I'm off to the Colonies. [*He stops, suddenly struck with a thought.*]

LILY. You silly boy.

CHARLEY. Supposing I did, eh?

LILY. We're not going to let the bathroom, so you needn't suppose anything.

CHARLEY. [*abstractedly—sitting on a corner of the table.*] Why not?

LILY. Did you speak, dear?

CHARLEY. [*starting.*] Eh?—No, no!—nothing.

LILY *goes, closing door.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: Sitting-room at 55 Acacia Avenue. The folding doors between front and back parlour are opened, with red curtains looped up. The front parlour, a glimpse of which is visible between curtains, is in full light and a corner of the piano can be seen. The furniture in this room is of the imitation Sheraton variety. There is an ornamental overmantel with photographs and vases, and a marble clock in the middle of the mantelpiece.

Someone is playing the piano, and LILY, *standing beside it, is singing in a sweet but rather weak voice, "Sing me to sleep." No one is in the back parlour, but through the curtains can be seen* MORTON LESLIE, *lolling on mantelpiece;* SYBIL FROST, *a pretty fair-haired girl, much given to laughing at everything;* PERCY MASSEY, *a good-looking, somewhat weak youth of perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two, sitting very close to* SYBIL, *and* TENNANT, *standing in the bay window.*

CHARLEY *comes in quietly through the side door into the back parlour during the singing. When* LILY *comes to the refrain of the song, everyone except* CHARLEY *joins in. He stays in the back parlour and sitting down in the shadow, lights a cigarette.* LILY *sits down amid a good deal of clapping and words of admiration.*

SYBIL. I do love that song.

PERCY. Now you sing something.

SYBIL. [*with a giggle.*] I couldn't really—you know I couldn't.

PERCY. Oh, yes, you can—that nice little coon thing you sang at the Richards.

SYBIL. I've got a cold.

MAGGIE. [*crossing from piano.*] Of course you have.

SYBIL. [*laughing.*] But it's quite true. Really. And I couldn't really sing after Mrs. Wilson.

LILY. Sybil! Do sing, *please.*

LESLIE. We're all waiting, Miss Frost.

SYBIL. Oh, please—I can't. Let someone else sing first.

MAGGIE *comes to the doorway and catches sight of* CHARLEY. *She comes in. In the front parlour* SYBIL *can be seen still resisting, while* LILY, LESLIE, *and* PERCY MASSEY *beseech her.*

MAGGIE. You here—all alone?

CHARLEY. 'Um.

MAGGIE. What's the matter?

CHARLEY. Nothing.

MAGGIE. Why didn't you come into the front room?

CHARLEY. I can hear quite as well here.

MAGGIE. Got the hump?

CHARLEY. What for? Head's a bit nasty, so I'm smoking it off.

MAGGIE. It isn't that—it's all this about Tennant.

CHARLEY. [*irritably.*] I'm not grieving over him, if that's what you mean.

MAGGIE. As if I did! and as if you'd confess if you were. Are you sick of everything?

CHARLEY. Sick! I'd cut the whole beastly show tomorrow if— [*He stops suddenly.*]

LILY'S *voice can be heard distinctly from the front room.*

LILY. Well, we'll ask Mr. Tennant to sing first.

SYBIL. Oh, I can't sing, really—

CHARLEY. Why doesn't the girl sing when she's asked?

MAGGIE. She says she has a cold. [*She laughs a little.*]

CHARLEY. Rot! Affectation, I call it.

MAGGIE. Percy's awfully smitten, isn't he?

CHARLEY. [*surprised.*] With her?

MAGGIE. Of course. But you haven't noticed that. Lily's been arranging it.

CHARLEY. But he's such a kid.

MAGGIE. He's twenty-two.

CHARLEY. What's that?

MAGGIE. Lots of men marry at twenty-two.

CHARLEY. More fools they! Getting tied up before they've seen anything.

MAGGIE. [*thoughtfully.*] I can never understand why a man gets married. He's got so many chances to see the world and do things—and then he goes and marries and settles down and is a family man before he's twenty-four.

CHARLEY. It's a habit.

MAGGIE. If I were a man I wouldn't stay in England another week. I wouldn't be a quill-driver all my life.

CHARLEY *gets up and walks restlessly up and down the room.*

If I were a man—

CHARLEY. Men can't do everything.

MAGGIE. I say, don't you think it's fine of Mr. Tennant to throw up everything and take the risk?

CHARLEY. I'd do the same if . . .

LILY. [*coming forward a little.*] Where's Charley? Oh, never mind, I daresay he's got a lantern and is looking for worms or something. Are you ready, Mr. Tennant?

MAGGIE. I wonder what Lil would say if you did!

CHARLEY *stops dead and looks at* MAGGIE.

CHARLEY. If I *did?* What are you talking about?

MAGGIE. Why shouldn't you?

CHARLEY. Why shouldn't I? Aren't there a thousand reasons?

MAGGIE. There's Lily, certainly—but . . .

CHARLEY. She wouldn't understand. She'd think I was deserting her.

A pause.

But that's not all. I might manage her—I don't know—but—you see, I've got a berth I can stay in all my life . . .

TENNANT *starts singing the first verse of "Off to Philadelphia."*

It's like throwing up a dead cert. And then. . . .

MAGGIE. It *would* be a splash.

CHARLEY. Yes—and think of all your people? What'd they say? They'd say I was running away from Lil—of course, it would seem like it. . . .

Another pause.

It's impossible. I might never get anything to do—and then—

His voice is suddenly drowned as the front room party sing the chorus "With my Knapsack," etc. Knock at front door.

I—

MAGGIE. I believe I heard a knock.

She goes out in corridor as TENNANT *commences the second verse.*

CHARLEY *sits on the edge of the table watching and listening. The door opens and* MAGGIE *enters, followed by* FENWICK. FENWICK *is a man of middle age, short and slight, with a quiet, rather crushed manner.*

MAGGIE. Mr. Fenwick didn't want to come in when he heard all the singing. He thought we had a party.

She goes through curtains.

CHARLEY. Oh, it's nothing—a sort of family sing-song.

FENWICK. Miss Massey would have me come in—but really I'd rather come some other—

CHARLEY. Stuff! Sit down. I'll pull the curtains if it's anything special you've come about. I thought it was perhaps over those geranium cuttings. Afterwards, if you feel like it, we'll go and join them. [*Draws curtains and turns up light.*] Freddy Tennant—you know him, don't you—he's going to seek his fortune in the Colonies.

FEN. Is he?

CHARLEY. Yes, and we'll drink his health. What's up?

FEN. I didn't see you at the train to-day.

CHARLEY. No, you were late. I came on with Malcolm.

FEN. The chief sent for me.

CHARLEY. Wasn't a rise, I suppose?

FEN. Do I look like it? It's the other thing.

CHARLEY. Docking?

FEN. [*nodding first and then speaking slowly.*] He said he'd sent for me as senior of my department. The company has had a bad year and they can't give the usual rises.

CHARLEY. None?

FEN. None. Haven't you had a letter?

CHARLEY. No. I say, have I got the sack?

FEN. No, you haven't. But they're offering you the same alternative they offered me—stay on at less—or go.

CHARLEY. [*walking up and down.*] What are you going to do?

FEN. What can I do? Stay, of course—what else is there?

CHARLEY. Sit down under it?

FEN. What else?

Postman's knock.

CHARLEY. There's the postman. Wait a bit.

He goes out R. and the voices in the other room can be distinctly heard laughing, while someone is playing a waltz tune very brilliantly.

CHARLEY *comes back with a letter in his hand, closes door and music dies down.*

CHARLEY. Here it is. [*He opens and reads it, then throws it on the table.*]

FENWICK. A bit of a blow, isn't it?

CHARLEY. I didn't expect it. Did you?

FENWICK. Not until last week when Morgan started making enquiries as to salaries, et cetera. Then I guessed.

CHARLEY. We can't do anything.

FENWICK. Of course not.

CHARLEY. But I say, you know, it's all rot about a bad year. Don't expect we've been exactly piling it up, but it's nothing to grumble about.

FENWICK. That doesn't affect us, anyway. We've got to do as we're told. I fancy old Morgan is hit, too. He was sugary, but of course he had to obey the instructions of the directors and so on.

CHARLEY. It's no good swearing at him.

FENWICK. It's no good swearing at anybody. What's a Board? Where is it?

The curtains part and LILY *appears in the opening.*

LILY. Charley—are you there? Are you never coming back? Oh, Mr. Fenwick!

FENWICK *rises; shake hands.*

FENWICK. Good evening. I'm afraid I'm an awful nuisance, but I just called to see your husband about a little business.

LILY. You'll stay to supper, won't you? You and

Charley can sit and talk business the whole time. I'm afraid Charley doesn't like music very much—do you, dear?

CHARLEY. Oh, sometimes.

LILY. [*big laugh from behind curtains.*] You should hear Mr. Leslie. He's so funny, he's been giving Mr. Tennant advice what to do when he's a lonely bachelor in Australia. He made us *roar* with laughter.

Goes back laughing.

CHARLEY. Silly ass!

FENWICK. [*startled.*] What?

CHARLEY. That chap Leslie! It'd do him good to go to Australia for a bit. He'd stick to his berth if they docked his screw to ten bob. He's got no pride in him.

FENWICK. Well, we—at least, I—can't say much—I'm going to stay on. You, too, I suppose.

CHARLEY. [*with a sort of defiance.*] Why should I? What's to hinder me leaving? Why shouldn't I go to Morgan and say, "Look here—just tell those directors that I won't stand it! I'm not going to be put up or down—take this or that—at their will and pleasure."

There is a burst of laughter from the inner room.

FENWICK. That's all very well—and if you've got something else—

CHARLEY. [*fiercely.*] I haven't—not an idea of one—but why should that hinder? Look at Tennant, he's chucked his job and no one wanted to take off anything.

FENWICK. [*quite undisturbed.*] Tennant? Oh, he's going to the Colonies? Very risky. I nearly went there myself once.

CHARLEY. Why didn't you quite?

FENWICK. Various things. All my people were against it. Oh, well, what was the good of going? It was only a passing fancy, I daresay. Once you

leave a place the chances are you won't get another. There are so many of us. . . .

CHARLEY. Of course, it's safe and it's wise and it's sensible and all that—but it's *damnable.*

FENWICK. It's come suddenly to you—I've almost got used to the idea. [*With a little laugh.*] You do, you know, after a little. You're young. . . . [*With sigh.*] Well, there it is. [*A pause.*] But I'd looked for that rise. It'll make a difference. [*Pulling himself together.*] However, it can't be helped. We've got something left and I'm safe, and that's more than a good many people can say. I'm sorry I came to-night, Wilson.

LESLIE'S *voice can be heard, shouting out a comic song.*

[*Smiling.*] Life doesn't seem to worry him.

CHARLEY. Won't you stay and have supper?

FENWICK. Thanks, no. I don't feel exactly sociable.

CHARLEY. [*with a short laugh.*] Neither do I, old chap. Fact is, I was feeling a bit off when you came.

FENWICK. You're a little restless, but it'll work off. Look at me. I felt like that once.

They go out.

The curtains are pulled wide and LESLIE *and* PERCY MASSEY *enter.* TENNANT *can be seen in the front parlour.*

LESLIE. May we interrupt? [*Looking around.*] Empty was the cradle.

Re-enter CHARLEY.

Where's the business?

CHARLEY. Fenwick's been, but he's just gone.

LESLIE. Fenwick? Wasn't cheerful company, was he?

CHARLEY. [*crossly.*] What's the matter with him?

LESLIE. He never is, that's all.

CHARLEY. He isn't exactly boisterous. He nearly emigrated once, he tells me.

TENNANT. [*coming forward.*] Why didn't he quite?

LESLIE. Not enough devil in him. Hundreds of 'em almost go.

CHARLEY. Did you?

LESLIE. [*with energy.*] I'm comfortable enough where I am. I've been telling this chap here he's a fool, but he won't believe me. He says he'd rather be a fool in the Colonies than a wise man here. Don't know what he means quite, but it sounds rather smart. [*Waving his pipe oracularly as he faces the three men.*] I've known lots of chaps who've wanted to go. The guv'nor is unpleasant or there's too much overtime or they get jealous of their girl or something of that sort and off they must go. I've known a few who went—and sorry they were, too. You can't do anything out there. Read the emigration books, read your papers. Failure all along the line. Market overcrowded. Only capitalists need apply—the Colonies don't want you—

CHARLEY. Neither does England—

LESLIE. Of course not but [*waving his arm impressively*] but you're here and got something. That's the whole point. My advice is—stick where you are. Tennant's a stupid ass to give up a decent berth; he deserves to fail. Of course, we should all like to see the world. *I* should—

TENNANT. It's more than that.

CHARLEY. Yes, yes, you don't understand. It isn't the idea of travelling—it's because you want to feel—oh! [*He stretches out his arms.*] I don't suppose you ever feel so—

LESLIE. Can't say I did.

TENNANT. Aren't you ever sick of the thing, Leslie?

CHARLEY. And don't you ever want to pitch all the ledgers into the dustbin and burn the stools?

LESLIE. Never—though I've met many that have. I tell you, it's a good thing to have a safe berth nowadays. Many fellows would only be too glad to pick up Tennant's berth—or yours, Wilson. Think of the crowds that will answer the advertisement at Molesey's— Last week our firm wanted a man to do overtime work, and they don't pay too high a rate—I can tell you. They had five hundred and fifteen applications—five hundred and fifteen! Think of that! And that's what would happen to you if you went, Wilson, and that'll be the end of Tennant. Sorry to be unpleasant—but truth—

TENNANT. But there's room on the land—

LESLIE. Land! What on earth can a bally clerk do with a spade? He'd be trying to stick it behind his ear—

Shout of laughter from PERCY MASSEY.

He's got no muscle—he's got a back that would break if he stooped—he'd always have a cold in his nose—

CHARLEY. Shut it, Leslie. You can't call Tennant exactly anæmic. And look at this. [*He strips off his coat and turns back his shirt sleeves to display his arms.*] How's that?

TENNANT *looks on with interest.* LESLIE *comes near and pinches* CHARLEY'S *arm, while* PERCY MASSEY *looks on smilingly.*

LESLIE. All right for a back garden. I suppose you think you're an authority on the land question 'cause you grow sweet peas?

CHARLEY. (*digging his hands into the pockets without turning down his sleeves again.*] I don't think anything of the kind. What I do know is that if I had a chance I could farm land with anybody. *Do* you think I chose this beastly business of quill-driving because it's the best work I know. Do you?

LESLIE. I don't suppose you chose it at all. Your father chose it for you.

PERCY. [*to* CHARLEY.] Well, I say, what's the matter with it?

CHARLEY. You wait till you're a few years older.

LESLIE. Wilson's caught the land fever. Take up an allotment—that'll cure you. Your garden isn't big enough. Have you got that map, Tennant?

TENNANT. It's in my room. Shall we go up?

LESLIE. Is there a fire?

TENNANT. No.

LESLIE. Bring it down, there's a good chap. I like to take things comfortable. I'll wait down here.

TENNANT *goes out R.*

LESLIE *rises; goes back to the front room.*

PERCY. I say, Charley—

CHARLEY. Well?

PERCY. I've got a rise.

CHARLEY. Congratulations—wish I had.

PERCY. Foster's given me Beckett's job.

CHARLEY. And Beckett?

PERCY. Well, he's got the sack, you know. It's a bit rough on him, but I couldn't help it, could I?

CHARLEY. I suppose you're doing it cheaper?

PERCY. That's about the line. I'm awfully sorry for Beckett. He's not young, and it's awfully hard to get anything when you're middle-aged.

CHARLEY. So I believe. Well, anyhow, you're in luck—aren't you?

PERCY. Yes, it's sooner than I thought.

They sit in silence.

TENNANT *re-enters, and goes into inner room.*

I say, Charley, what did you start on?

CHARLEY. Eh? What d'ye mean?

PERCY. You—and—and Lily—you know.

CHARLEY *looks at him steadily.*

CHARLEY. Oh, that's it, is it?

PERCY. You didn't begin with a house, of course.

CHARLEY. You know as well as I do that we had three rooms—and jolly small ones.

PERCY. Still you were comfortable.

CHARLEY. It was warm—winter and summer.

PERCY. It wasn't very expensive?

CHARLEY. You have to choose your housekeeper carefully.

PERCY. If you're going to chaff—

CHARLEY. Don't be an idiot. You've now got ninety, I suppose. You can manage on that.

PERCY. You really think so?

CHARLEY. I know from experience.

PERCY. You don't ask who the lady is?

CHARLEY. Sybil is a pretty little girl.

PERCY. Well, I suppose you did guess a bit.

CHARLEY. Not me! Maggie and Lil did it between them.

PERCY. Did it?

CHARLEY. Made the match—Maggie told me.

PERCY. [*indignantly.*] They did nothing of the kind. I met Sybil here and . . .

CHARLEY. 'Um—um!

PERCY. We just came together—it was bound to be.

There is a sound of laughter outside and LILY *and* SYBIL *are seen carrying in cakes and lemonade.*

CHARLEY. She *is* pretty—

PERCY. Yes, in rather an unusual—

CHARLEY. But so are others.

PERCY. I say, old man.

CHARLEY. Well, aren't they? I suppose you won't listen to advice.

PERCY. What about?

CHARLEY. You're too young to marry.

PERCY. I'm twenty-three. So were you when you married.

CHARLEY. I was too young.

PERCY. Do you mean. . . .

CHARLEY. [*impatiently.*] Oh, don't look so scandalised. No, I'm not tired of Lily. It's not that at all—but, are you satisfied to be a clerk all your life?

PERCY. I say, Tennant's upset you. Of course I'm satisfied to be a clerk.

CHARLEY. But *are* you?

PERCY. [*impatiently.*] Don't I say so?

CHARLEY. Have you ever felt a desire to kick your hat into the fire? Have you?

PERCY. No! Not yet!

CHARLEY. Not yet. There you are—but you will. Don't you ever want to see anything more of the world—did you ever have that feeling?

PERCY. [*a little thoughtfully.*] Well, I did once. I wanted to go out with Robinson. But the dad wouldn't consent. It was a bit risky, you know, and this job came along—and so I wouldn't go.

CHARLEY. Did Robinson come back?

PERCY. No, he's got a decent little place out there.

CHARLEY. They don't all fail, then?

PERCY. Of course not—but lots do. I might be one of those.

CHARLEY. Well, the thing is if you ever thought of doing anything now's your time. You can't do it afterwards. Take my tip and don't get engaged yet. You're too young to decide such an important question.

PERCY. No younger than you were—and I must say. . . .

CHARLEY. Don't be so touchy—can't you see I'm talking to you for your good?

PERCY. I think you're crazed.

CHARLEY. [*sharply.*] Why am I crazed, as you call it? Isn't it because I know a little what your life is going to be? Haven't I gone backwards and forwards to the city every day of my life since I was sixteen and am I crazed because I suggest it's a bit monotonous? [*Going close to* PERCY *and putting his hand on his shoulder solemnly.*] I'm not saying she isn't the right girl for you—I'm only suggesting that perhaps she isn't! She's pretty and she's handy. . . .

PERCY. I say! I won't have that.

CHARLEY. Don't. Pass it over. It's just this—think—and don't marry the first pretty girl and live in three rooms because your brother-in-law did it.

PERCY. She wasn't—the first pretty girl. . . .

SYBIL. [*appearing at opening and smiling demurely.*] Mrs. Wilson says—Oh, Mr. Wilson, have you been fighting?

CHARLEY. [*suddenly remembering that he has his coat off.*] I beg your pardon. [*He pulls it on hastily.*] [*To* PERCY.] Remember!

PERCY. [*with his eyes on* SYBIL.] Rot! [*Goes back with* SYBIL.]

LILY. [*coming towards him.*] Who said anything about fighting? Now I suppose you've been arguing with everybody and shouted at them. You do get so cross when you argue—don't you, dear? Supper is quite ready. I sent Sybil to tell you. . . .

CHARLEY. Sybil's feeding Percy. She's got all her work cut out.

LILY. How rude you are! Do you know, I'm quite angry with you. You've hardly been in the whole evening.

CHARLEY. Fenwick. . . .

LILY. Yes, I saw him. He looks so lifeless, don't you think?

CHARLEY. He says I shall grow like him.

LILY. What an idea! Why, how could you?

The COMPANY *move about the two rooms, the* MEN *handing refreshments to the* WOMEN—*they* ALL *come more forward.*

LESLIE. What do you think—? I lost the 8.15 this morning!

CHARLEY. Should have thought it would have waited for you.

LESLIE. I left the house at the usual time and there was a confounded woman at the station with about five trunks and a paper parcel, who took up the whole doorway.

Much laughing from SYBIL *and an encouraging smile from* LILY.

By the time I got over the train was gone. Never did such a thing in my life before.

LILY. *You* haven't sung to us, Charley, dear.

MAGGIE. He's tired.

LILY. Not too tired for that, are you?

SYBIL. Oh, do, Mr. Wilson, I know you sing splendidly. Per— Mr. Massey told me so.

PERCY. S'sh! don't give me away—he's my brother-in-law.

CHARLEY. Not to-night, Lil—I—I'm a little hoarse.

LILY. That's being out in the garden at all hours.

LESLIE. Don't say that, Mrs. Wilson. Your husband wants to go as a farmer in the Colonies—and you'll discourage him.

LILY. You silly man, Mr. Leslie. [*To Charley.*] You must have something hot when you go to bed, dear.

LESLIE. I love being a little ill. My wife's an awfully good nurse.

SYBIL. I believe you put it on sometimes, Mr. Leslie.

LESLIE. Well, do you know—I believe I do. Ladies won't put their pretty fingers round your neck for noth-

ing. But if you have a little hoarseness—not too much to be really unpleasant—or a headache is a very good thing—it is delightful—I always say to myself:

"O woman—in our hours of ease—
Uncertain, coy and hard to please,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou."

LILY. We ought to have "Auld Lang Syne"—

TENNANT. Please don't.

LILY. It would be so nice for you to remember. [*Going up L.*] Yes, we must. Come. [*She puts out her hands and makes them* ALL *form a ring, with hands crossed and all round table.*]

TENNANT *and* CHARLEY *join most reluctantly and are not seen to sing a note.*

There! That's better.

SYBIL. Now I must go, Mrs. Wilson.

LILY. Must you really? Come and get your things.

They go out.

*A tapping is heard at the window in the near room—*MAGGIE *runs and opens it.*

VOICE. Is my husband there, Mrs. Wilson?

LESLIE. Y—es. I'm here. Coming, darling.

SYBIL *and* LILY *re-enter R.*

LESLIE. My wife has sent for me home, Mrs. Wilson.

MAGGIE. Are you going over the wall?

SYBIL. Oh, do, Mr. Leslie—I should love to see you.

LESLIE. If it will give you any pleasure it shall be done, though I am not at my best on the fence.

They all crowd round—he shakes hands, smiling profusely, and disappears through the window.

VOICE. Mind the flower-pot. No—not there—that's the dustbin. Not the steps.

There is a great shout to announce his safe arrival.

LESLIE. Safe!

SYBIL. I do think he is so funny!

LILY. Yes, isn't he? Are you going by 'bus?

PERCY. *I'm* going Miss Frost's way.

SYBIL. [*much surprised.*] Are you really?

MAGGIE. How extraordinary!

Much kissing between SYBIL, LILY *and* MAGGIE. SYBIL *and* PERCY *go out.*

LILY. She's so sweet, isn't she? And Percy's so awfully gone.

MAGGIE. [*as they start clearing away the dishes.*] Very. So he was over Daisy Mallock and Ruby Denis —and who's the other girl with the hair?

LILY. The hair? What do you mean?

MAGGIE. The one with the hair all over her eyes—nice hair, too.

LILY. Gladys Vancouver? Poor Percy—I'm afraid he is a little bit of a flirt.

MAGGIE. He's got nothing else to do with his evenings.

LILY. And then people like Mr. Tennant think it's a dull life.

MAGGIE. Well, good night all. No, don't come out, Mr. Tennant—I'm quite a capable person.

TENNANT. Oh, but I shall—if you'll allow me.

MAGGIE. I'd rather you didn't—still, if you will. [*They go out with* LILY.]

CHARLEY *looks round and sighs with relief—he walks round, looks out of the window, then at the garden—he takes up the paper, but after trying in vain to settle to it, throws it on the floor —he re-fills his pipe and lights it. Re-enter* TENNANT.

TENNANT. Well. [*He pauses, but* CHARLEY *does not stir.*] I say, Wilson, I never thought you'd take it like this.

CHARLEY *does not answer, but only shifts restlessly.*

I thought you'd think I was a fool too. In fact I was half ashamed to say anything about it. It wouldn't do for most people, you know. I'm in an exceptional position, and even in spite of that they call me an ass. I've got a little cash, too.

CHARLEY. [*quickly.*] So have I.

TENNANT. Yes, but the cases are different. I can rough it.

CHARLEY. Let me have the chance to rough it.

TENNANT. You're married.

CHARLEY *does not reply.*

You're settled. Your friends are here. I've got nothing and nobody to worry about.

They both smoke in silence.

I say, don't sit up and think. Go to bed.

CHARLEY. I'm going soon. Don't stay up, old chap.

TENNANT. You'll get over it.

He goes out.

Enter LILY—*she pulls down blind and fastens catch of window.*

LILY. I'm going up now. Don't be long. You look so tired.

CHARLEY. [*irritably.*] Oh, don't fret about me. I'm a little worried, that's all.

LILY. [*timidly.*] Did Mr. Fenwick bring bad news? He looked miserable enough.

CHARLEY. [*looking at her steadily.*] Yes, I'm not going to have that rise.

LILY. Oh, dear—what a shame! Why?

CHARLEY. Lots of reasons—but that's all.

LILY. Of course, you're worried. Still—it might have been worse. You might have been sent away.

CHARLEY. Yes.

LILY. It's very disheartening—after all we'd planned

to do with it. You won't be able to have the greenhouse, now, will you, dear?

CHARLEY. [*with a short laugh.*] What's the good of a greenhouse in that yard. It isn't that.

LILY. [*a little timidly.*] But we can manage very well, dear. We—you remember what I said this morning—about the other lodger.

CHARLEY. Oh, don't, for heaven's sake. It isn't losing the cash I mind; it's having to give in like this. I want to go to them and tell them to do their worst and get somebody else.

LILY. But dear, you might lose your place.

CHARLEY. I should.

LILY. But that—we couldn't afford that, could we? Why, we can manage quite well as we are. I can be very careful still—

CHARLEY. I'm tired of going on as we've been going.

LILY. What do you want to do?

CHARLEY. I—I want to go away. [*Pause.*]

LILY. And leave me?

CHARLEY. [*suddenly remembering.*] Oh—er—

LILY. It's just that horrid Mr. Tennant—

CHARLEY. It's nothing to do with him—at least.

. . .

LILY. I said it was. He wants you to go with him—and you want to go—you're tired of me—

CHARLEY. [*going up to her and trying to speak gently but being very irritated—his voice is sharp.*] Oh, don't cry . . . you don't understand. Look, Lil, supposing I went and you came out afterwards.

LILY. You want to go without me.

CHARLEY. I couldn't take you, dear, but I would soon send for you; it wouldn't be long.

LILY. You want to go without me. You're tired of me.

CHARLEY. Oh, don't cry, Lil. I didn't say I was go-

ing. Of course I don't want to leave you, dear. You mustn't take any notice. [*Attempting to take her in his arms.*]

LILY. [*turning away from him, sobs.*] But you do. . . .

CHARLEY. I don't want to go because I want to leave you. . . .

LILY. But you said. . . .

CHARLEY. Never mind what I said. [*He kisses her and pets her like a child.*] Come, go to bed. It's the news—and the excitement about Tennant—and all that. Come, go back to bed and I'll be up in a few minutes.

CHARLEY *leads her to the door and coaxes her outside and stands at the door a few seconds, then he comes back into the room, stands still, looking round. He goes to the front parlour and hunts over the chairs and the piano as if in search of something. Finally he picks up a paper off the floor and brings to table—it is the map of Australia. He opens it on the table and leans over it, his pipe unnoticed burning out in his left hand.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: The sitting-room at "Sunnybank," Hammersmith. There is no centre table, but there are various small ones against the wall and in the window. There is a piano, a tall palm in the window, and one or two wicker chairs that creak. The rest of the furniture is upholstered in saddlebags with antimacassars over the sofa head and armchairs. Gramophone in the corner. Big mirror over mantelpiece. Gilt clock in glass case and lustres.

MRS. MASSEY *is sleeping in one armchair.* MR. MASSEY *is asleep on sofa, pulled across centre.* MAGGIE *sits reading at small table.* MAGGIE *softly rises and goes to fire. She pokes it and a piece of coal falls out.* MRS. M. *turns her head.*

MAGGIE. I'm so sorry, Mother, I tried to poke it gently.

MRS. M. I was hardly asleep, my dear.

MAGGIE. Mother!—you've been sleeping for half an hour!

MRS. M. It didn't seem like it, dear. Why, your father's asleep.

MAGGIE. Isn't that extraordinary!

MRS. M. [*admiringly.*] How soundly he sleeps! What's the time?

MAGGIE. Four o'clock.

MRS. M. I should have thought they'd have been here now.

MAGGIE. Not Percy and Sybil, I hope. You don't expect *them,* until the last minute, do you?

MRS. M. No, dear—of course not.

MAGGIE. I wouldn't walk the streets this afternoon for any man.

MRS. M. I don't suppose they find it cold.

MAGGIE. Oh, I daresay they're sitting in the Park.

MRS. M. I hope they won't be late for tea. I shall want mine soon.

MAGGIE. I'll put on the kettle now and when Lil and Charley come, we will have tea and not wait for the others. We'll have it cosily in here. [*She goes out, returning with kettle, which she puts on fire. Sits close to* MRS. MASSEY.]

MAGGIE. Mother!

MRS. M. Yes.

MAGGIE. Mother, did you love father when you married him—very much, I mean, very, very much!

MRS. M. [*much astonished.*] What a question! Of course.

MAGGIE. More than any other man you'd ever seen?

MRS. M. Of course!

MAGGIE. More than everything and everybody?

MRS. M. *Of course!*

MAGGIE. Well, there's something wrong with me, then—or else with Walter. I don't feel a bit like that. There's no "of course" with me. I wouldn't go and sit in the Park with him this afternoon for anything.

MRS. M. I suppose you've quarrelled?

MAGGIE. No, we haven't. I wish we had.

MRS. M. Maggie! Don't talk like that.

MAGGIE. But I do. He wants me to marry him next month.

MRS. M. And a very good thing too.

MAGGIE. He says he's found a house, and wants me to go and look at it. *I* don't want to see it.

MRS. M. What's come over you lately? You used to be satisfied. Walter is very nice and attentive—in fact, quite devoted.

MAGGIE. Yes, I know. Just like he was to his first wife, I expect.

MRS. M. You've such an absurd prejudice against widowers, Maggie. You're jealous.

MAGGIE. I'm not. Not a bit. But I do wish he would do something, and not worry about getting married.

MRS. M. The poor man is doing something, I should think, running after you every spare minute, and house hunting.

MAGGIE. I would much rather he went to Australia —or somewhere.

MRS. M. That's that absurd Tennant man again. You're not in love with *him,* I hope?

MAGGIE. [*promptly.*] Not a scrap! I find him rather dull.

MRS. M. Then what is it?

MAGGIE. I should like Walter to go out and seek his fortune instead of getting it in a coal merchant's office.

MRS. M. He mightn't come back.

MAGGIE. [*thoughtfully.*] Perhaps he wouldn't.

Click of gate.

MRS. M. There's the gate, Maggie.

MAGGIE *goes out R. She comes back in a moment, followed by* LILY. LILY *goes to her mother and kisses her. She looks at her father.*

LILY. Father asleep?

MAGGIE. What a question. Shall I take your hat and coat?

LILY *takes them off and hands them to* MAGGIE. You're shivering! Sit close to the fire. Aren't you well?

LILY. [*in a pathetic voice.*] Yes, I'm well, thank you.

MRS. M. Are you alone?

LILY. Charley is coming on. He's gone to the station with Mr. Tennant.

MRS. M. To see him off?

LILY. No—Mr. Tennant goes to-morrow.

MAGGIE *goes out with hat and coat. She brings back with her a tray, with cloth, etc.. and prepares for tea on a small table.*

MRS. M. Have you got another lodger?

LILY. No. We—we've got to have two.

MRS. M. Two? What for?

MAGGIE *stops to listen.*

LILY. They've reduced Charley's salary.

MRS. M. [*sitting up energetically.*] Reduced it? What for?

LILY. I don't know—I . . . oh, I'm so miserable. [*She suddenly covers her face with her hands and sobs.*]

MAGGIE. [*stooping over her.*] Lil, dear, you're not crying over *that,* are you?

LILY. [*sobbing.*] Oh, no, no! It doesn't matter. We can make room for two lodgers quite well. I don't mind the work.

MAGGIE. Then what is it?

MRS. M. I suppose you and Charley have quarrelled?

MAGGIE. Tell us, dear.

LILY. Charley—wants—to go away—and leave me.

MRS. M. What? What's this?

LILY. [*looking apprehensively round at the sleeping figure.*] Hush! don't wake father!

MAGGIE. He won't wake till the tea-cups rattle. Charley wants to leave YOU!

MRS. M. I *knew* they'd quarrelled.

LILY. We haven't—not exactly—but he's been so

funny ever since Mr. Tennant said he was going to Australia. He wants to go too.

MRS. M. What next? Charley ought to be ashamed of himself. Go to Australia indeed! He forgets he is married.

LILY. I don't want him to stay just because he's married, if he wants to leave me.

MAGGIE. You are quite *wrong,* I'm sure, Lil. He doesn't want to leave you at all. He wants to leave his work.

MRS. M. Perhaps he does. So do other people very often. Suppose we all stopped work when we didn't like it? A pretty muddle the world would be in. Charley is forgetting there is such a thing as duty.

LILY. He's very unhappy—and I—I can't make him happy.

MRS. M. So he ought to be miserable with such ideas in his head. I never heard of such a thing! The sooner Mr. Tennant goes the better. He's been putting Charley up to this, I suppose?

MAGGIE. You don't know Mr. Tennant, mother. He's not that sort.

MRS. M. Then what made Charley think of it at all?

MAGGIE. It's just a feeling you get sometimes, mother. You can't help it. Office work is awf'lly monotonous.

MRS. M. Of course it is. So is all work. Do you expect work to be pleasant? Does anybody ever like work? The idea is absurd. Anyone would think work was to be pleasant. You don't come into the world to have pleasure. We've got to do our duty, and the more cheerfully we can do it, the better for ourselves and everybody else.

LILY. I—I didn't mean to tell you.

MRS. M. He ought to be talked to.

LILY. Don't say anything, please—not yet. Perhaps after tea we can all talk about it, and it may do him good.

MAGGIE *goes out.* LILY *starts to arrange the tea-cups.* MR. MASSEY *rouses. Re-enter* MAGGIE *with tea-pot.*

MASSEY. Tea?

MAGGIE. Yes, Daddy.

MASSEY. In here? There's no room.

MAGGIE. It's cosey. I'll bring yours to the sofa.

MASSEY. Where am I to put it?—on the floor?

MAGGIE. I'll bring up a table for you if you must have one. You wouldn't do for a Society gentleman. Can't you balance a cup on your knee?

MASSEY. I don't mean to try. Hope you haven't got out those finnicky little cups. I want my own.

MAGGIE. I've got your own—here. [*She holds up a very big breakfast cup, plain white with gilt band.*]

MASSEY. I didn't hear you come in, Lil. Where's Charley?

LILY. Coming on.

MASSEY. What've you done with Foster, Mag?

MAGGIE. He's not coming.

MAGGIE *takes tea round.*

MASSEY. Gone away for the week end?

MAGGIE. [*taking a cup for herself and sitting down beside* LILY.] Oh, no! He's not coming. That's all. Lily and I are grass widows. It's a very nice feeling.

MASSEY. It's all right about you, but Lil looks a bit off. You've got a cold. Your eyes are red.

LILY. Yes, father.

MRS. M. You've dropped some bread and butter on the carpet, Alfred.

MASSEY. [*irritably.*] Of course I have! I knew I should.

MAGGIE. [*running to pick it up.*] Percy hasn't come back with Sybil yet, Dad. We expect they're sitting in the Park.

MASSEY. [*his attention taken from his grievance.*] What, in this weather?

MAGGIE. The seats will be dry and they sit close together, you know. I've often seen them do it.

MASSEY. [*chuckling.*] You have, have you? And what about yourself? What about yourself? You! Lord! what a nest of turtle doves it is—nothing but billing and cooing!

MAGGIE. Especially Percy.

MASSEY. P'raps so. He's young at it. Well, he'll be the next, I suppose. And you, too, Mag?

MAGGIE. I'm in no hurry.

MRS. M. [*a little impatiently to Maggie.*] Don't talk like that, my dear.

MASSEY. Of course she says she isn't. She's a modest young woman—I never heard *you* say you were in a hurry, my dear.

MRS. M. Of course I shouldn't—to you.

MASSEY. Ha, ha! You put on the shy business then. Lord! these women. [MAGGIE *moves towards table.*] Come, now, Mag, confess! You think of it sometimes.

MAGGIE. I think of it a lot.

MASSEY. There you are! There you are! What did I say?

MAGGIE. And what do you think I think about it?

MASSEY. How should I know. Wedding, I suppose. I bet you never think of anything else after the wedding day.

MAGGIE. [*slowly.*] I think of the wedding dress, and the bridesmaids, and the pages. Shall I have pages, Mum?

MRS. M. Maggie!

MAGGIE. I suppose I shan't. I think of the house

I'm going to have, Daddy—and the furniture, and I'm going to have a cat and a dog—

MASSEY. [*slyly.*] Nothing else, of course. Just a cat and a dog. Ha, ha!

MRS. M. Alfred, don't suggest. It isn't nice.

MASSEY. A cat and dog—ha, ha, ha!

MAGGIE. Don't laugh, Daddy. I'm telling you the solemn truth—I think most of all that I shall never, never, never have to go into a shop again.

MASSEY. I wish old Foster could hear you.

MAGGIE. Why?

MASSEY. He'd say—"And where do I come in?"

MAGGIE. Well, of course he'll be there. I wish—

MRS. M. Maggie, my dear—I should like a little more tea! Have you got some more hot water?

MAGGIE. I'll get some. [*Goes out.*]

MASSEY. It's all very well for her to chaff, but she ain't quite natural about this affair of hers. She ought to be more pleased—excited like.

MRS. M. I think they've had a little quarrel. People often do. She's a little bit down about it. We've had a talk about it.

MASSEY. Well, she can't have any quarrel about him himself. *He's* all right, and got a jolly soft job, too. He'll make her a good husband. He's insured for £500.

MRS. M. Is he? That's very nice. If anything happened to him she'd be all right.

MASSEY. He's a thoughtful sort of chap. Of course he's not exactly young, but he's steady.

MRS. M. The poor child is jealous of his first wife.

MASSEY. You don't say so? Jealous, is she? That's all right—that's a healthy feeling. I'm glad she's jealous, but she'll get over it once she's married. Jealous! Lord! Fancy, Mag too—I wouldn't have thought it. He'll be head clerk, one of these days—he can stay at Whitakers all his life. He told me.

LILY. Do you think he'll ever get tired of it?

MRS. M. What an idea!

MASSEY. [*roaring.*] Tired! Tired of what? A good job? Why ever should he be? He couldn't have anything better—Ten to half-past five every day of his life, except Saturdays, and then it's *one*—and three weeks' holiday. Think of that?

LILY. But, I—

Enter MAGGIE *with hot water. The door-bell is heard.*

MRS. M. Let them in, Lily, my dear—it's Percy and Syb.

LILY *goes out R.*

Re-enter LILY *a moment after, followed by* PERCY *and* SYBIL.

SYBIL *kisses* MRS. MASSEY *and* MAGGIE.

SYBIL. Aren't we dreadfully late, Mrs. Massey? I'm *so* sorry!

PERCY. Awfully sorry, but my watch is—

MAGGIE. Don't blame the poor thing—it's all right.

MASSEY. The watch, was it? Come here, my girl!

SYBIL *goes to him with giggling shyness. He takes her face between his hands.*

Was it the watch? Not a bit of it! It was this—[*He pats her cheek*] these roses. Lucky young dog! Percy! [*He kisses her.*]

MAGGIE. Rather cold in the Park, isn't it?

PERCY. Not very.

MAGGIE. There's a northeast wind. Still, you can find a sheltered seat.

PERCY. Just beyond the glass house thing.

MAGGIE. What did I tell you? [*Looking triumphantly round.*]

SYBIL. [*covering her cheeks.*] What a tease you are, Maggie!

MASSEY. Don't listen to her!

PERCY. You're only giving yourself away, Mag. What do you know about sheltered seats and glass houses?

MAGGIE. It wasn't exactly guess work. [*Click of gate.*]

MRS. M. There's Walter.

MAGGIE. What?

MASSEY. Isn't she surprised? Now isn't she surprised? Fancy! Walter!

MAGGIE. He said he wasn't coming. [*She looks out of the window.*] Charley is with him.

LILY. Will you open the door, Maggie?

MAGGIE. [*almost at the same moment.*] Go to the door, Percy.

PERCY. Well, you're two dutifully loving young women, I must say.

MAGGIE. You forget—we're used to it. [PERCY *goes out.*] Come, Sybil, and take off your things.

Exeunt SYBIL *and* MAGGIE.

Enter WALTER FOSTER, *a man of about* 35, *prosperous looking, rather stout of build, and fair.* CHARLEY *also enters, and* PERCY.

FOSTER. [*looking round for* MAGGIE.] Good afternoon. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. M. *and* MASSEY.]

MRS. M. She's gone up with Sybil, Walter.

FOSTER. Oh! I was afraid she was out, perhaps.

MASSEY. Well, Charles, you're not looking spry.

CHARLEY. I'm a bit seedy—nothing much.

MASSEY. And when's that madman lodger of yours going, eh?

CHARLEY. To-morrow.

MASSEY. Of all the fools he's the biggest I know.

The door opens, and SYBIL *and* MAGGIE *come back.*

MAGGIE. I was just telling Sybil, Percy, that tea is laid in the sitting-room. We didn't know when you'd be in.

She crosses up to FOSTER *and lifts her face to be kissed.*

SYBIL. Isn't she dreadful?

MASSEY. Well, you won't be alone, don't you worry. Charley here wants some tea, and Lil will have to see he gets it, won't you, Lil?

LILY. Yes, Dad.

MAGGIE. [*to* FOSTER.] Have you had tea?

FOSTER. Yes, thanks.

Exeunt all, except MASSEY, MAGGIE *and* FOSTER.

MASSEY. [*finally he looks at the* TWO, *then at the clock; poking the fire, then humming a little.*] Have you seen the "Argus," Mag?

MAGGIE. In the kitchen. I'll get it. [*Makes a move to the door.*]

MASSEY. No, no, I'm going out.

Goes.

MAGGIE. Father calls that tact.

FOSTER. [*coming over to her.*] What?

MAGGIE. Didn't you notice? He doesn't want the "Argus," really.

FOSTER. [*just understanding.*] You mean he's left us together?

MAGGIE. Yes.

FOSTER. Awfully kind of him! I say, Maggie, you don't mind my coming, do you? I really had to. We—hadn't made arrangements about Tuesday.

MAGGIE *laughing a little sadly.*

MAGGIE. And you couldn't write them? You are very good to me, Walter.

FOSTER. Don't talk like that.

A pause.

Maggie, I—you haven't kissed me yet.

MAGGIE. I did—when you came in.

FOSTER. No—I kissed *you.*

MAGGIE. I'm sorry—I—I don't care for kissing in front of people.

FOSTER. [*getting bolder.*] There's no one here now.

MAGGIE rises, turns, and looking at him very straight, then lifts her face—pause—and going to him, kisses him on the lips. He keeps her close to him till she gently moves herself away.

I've got something here—you said the other day you wanted—you would like one of those Dutch brooches.

He puts his hand in his coat pocket and brings out a little parcel.

Here it is!

MAGGIE. [*unfastens it.*] It *is* good of you! You are so thoughtful!

She looks at him.

I suppose— [*She kisses him again.*]

Delighted, he keeps hold of her hand. She looks at him and then at her hand imprisoned in his, and then away at the fire.

FOSTER. What's the matter, dear?

MAGGIE. [*impatiently drawing her hand away.*] It's still the mood. I can't help it. I don't feel like love-making.

FOSTER. All right, dear—I won't bother you.

MAGGIE. Perhaps if you did bother—no, never mind. You know I asked you not to come to-day.

FOSTER. Yes.

MAGGIE. Well, I had no reason, except that I didn't feel like it. But I ought to feel like you always, didn't I?

FOSTER. You're different from me. I always feel like you.

MAGGIE. Walter, I don't want to settle down. I want to go and—and do things.

FOSTER. What things, dear?

MAGGIE. Oh, I don't know. [*A pause.*] Did you ever go abroad?

FOSTER. Yes, to Paris, once at Easter.

MAGGIE. Oh! just for a holiday. Wouldn't you just love to go out and try your luck? Have a change?—Do something with your hands? Aren't you ever tired of what you are doing?

FOSTER. I can't say I am, really. Why should I? The work is not too hard, But you like change. I have a good salary, you know, dear. When we are married you can go about a lot, you'll be quite free.

MAGGIE. No, I shan't.

FOSTER. But you can have a servant and all that, you know.

MAGGIE. Oh, yes—yes—I understand.

FOSTER. If I went abroad—suppose it, for instance—I shouldn't have you, should I?

MAGGIE. No, and a good thing for you. You deserve something better. You know—you *know,* Walter, that I don't love you half or a quarter as you love me.

FOSTER. Yes, I know that. But you don't love anybody else.

MAGGIE. No. Have you ever thought that I'm really marrying you to get out of the shop?

FOSTER. Of course not. Of course you are glad to leave the shop because you don't like it. You are so tied.

MAGGIE. I should love to be absolutely independent, quite—altogether free for a whole year. Oh!

FOSTER. [*a little hurt.*] You will be free when you are married to me, Maggie. You can do anything you like.

MAGGIE. [*looking at him despairingly for a moment, then suddenly going up to him.*] You are a dear!—you are, really! Marry me quick, Walter!

He takes her in his arms delightedly.

Quick—or—or—

FOSTER. Or what? [*Very tenderly.*]

MAGGIE. Or I shall run away.

FOSTER. And where would you run to?

MAGGIE. Perhaps if I'd known where to run to—I should have gone before.

FOSTER. Dearest, don't talk like that!

MAGGIE. [*turning away a little.*] But I don't! I'm safe!

MASSEY *is heard outside the door, coughing and making a noise. Enters.*

I'm afraid you've caught a cold in the kitchen, Daddy. I thought you went for the "Argus"?

MASSEY. So I did. [*He looks down at it.*]

MAGGIE. And you've brought the "Family Herald." [*She takes it from him.*]

Enter MRS. MASSEY, CHARLEY, LILY, PERCY *and* SYBIL.

MRS. M. Play something, Lily.

LILY *goes to piano and picks out some music.* SYBIL *and* PERCY *occupy one big chair between them.* CHARLEY *stands idly at window, turning over an album.*

PERCY. Going to church, mother?

MRS. M. No, dear, it's a very nasty night. Such a cold wind.

PERCY. Last Sunday it was the rain—and the week before it was foggy, and the week before—

SYBIL. Don't be such a very rude boy!

She puts her hand over his mouth and he takes it and holds it.

MRS. M. [*complacently.*] You're a bad boy to make fun of your old mother. I went to church this morning.

PERCY. You're getting a oncer, mother.

MRS. M. Well, I should only go to sleep if I went.

PERCY. Think of the example you set if you put in an appearance.

MRS. M. Yes, dear; I have thought of that, but it wouldn't do for them to see me asleep.

FOSTER. [*who always has the effect of trying to smooth things over.*] I'm sure it is better for you to rest, Mrs. Massey, than walk such a distance twice a day!

MRS. M. Yes, it is rather a long way. It's quite a quarter of an hour's walk, and I don't care to ride on Sundays.

LILY *plays, choosing the mournful hymn, "Abide with me."* CHARLEY *fidgets, goes to the piano and then back again to the window.*

MASSEY. Can't you find a seat, Charles? You look uncomfortable.

CHARLEY. Plenty, thanks. Sybil only has half a one.

SYBIL. Oh, Mr. Wilson. [*She fidgets away from* PERCY, *who pulls her back again.*]

LILY *has played the tune through. She stops.*

MRS. M. That's such a nice tune, don't you think, Walter?

FOSTER. Very!—rather plaintive, but soothing.

LILY *starts another—this time "Sun of my Soul."*

CHARLEY. For heaven's sake, Lil, play something cheerful.

LILY *stops, turns undecidedly on the stool, looks round imploringly at* CHARLEY, *turns a few pages and then rises and goes out of the room hurriedly.*

SYBIL. She's crying!

MASSEY. What?

MRS. M. You've hurt her, Charley, speaking like that. There was nothing to get cross about. She came this afternoon crying.

CHARLEY. I've done nothing! I—

Exit MRS. MASSEY *in much indignation.*

MASSEY. Had a tiff?

CHARLEY. A tiff—we don't tiff.

MASSEY. Well, then, don't shout at her like that. [*To* SYBIL.] Here—are you sure she was crying?

SYBIL. Yes, quite.

MASSEY. That's queer. She didn't use to.

CHARLEY. She's been worrying, I expect. Women worry so quick.

MASSEY. What's she got to worry about? A bit hysterical, perhaps.

Re-enter MRS. MASSEY.

MASSEY. Is she better?

MRS. M. She's got a headache, she says. But it isn't that; I know what's the matter. When she came to-day she could hardly speak—

CHARLEY. [*interrupting.*] Is she worrying over me?

MASSEY. What's she got to worry over you about?

CHARLEY. I happened to say—I got the hump, I think. . . . I feel a bit restless. . . .

MRS. M. [*hotly.*] You know what it is well enough. You want to go away with that Tennant man and leave your wife—

MASSEY. [*shouting.*] What!

SYBIL *looks shocked,* PERCY *astonished, while* FOSTER *tries to pretend he didn't hear.*

MRS. M. The poor child's breaking her heart because she says he wants to leave her.

CHARLEY. I never said anything of the kind—I never thought of such a thing, I—

MRS. M. *Do* you want to go away with that man?

MASSEY. I should think you're mad, both of you, to talk about it. Go with who? What for? What're you talking about?

MRS. M. Sybil told me distinctly this afternoon that Charley wanted to go to Australia. She nearly cried her eyes out. Of course that means he wants to leave her. What else could it mean? She said he'd been funny and she was miserable. I said Charley ought to be ashamed of himself to want to go away like that, and so I think so.

MASSEY. [*sitting up very straight and looking angry.*] What's all this, Charley? What . . .

FOSTER *on tip toe slowly goes to door.*

CHARLEY. Don't go, Foster. Let's have all the family in. You're going to be part of it some day.

FOSTER. [*sitting down again.*] I'm quite ready to go.

CHARLEY. No, don't. Let's have it out. You may as well know, all of you.

MRS. M. [*with a resignation of despair.*] Then you do want—to go and leave her? It's disgraceful!

CHARLEY. [*Angrily.*] What stuff you all talk! I—

MRS. M. Do you or do you not want to go?

CHARLEY. Yes, I do!

General consternation.

MRS. M. There! I said so.

Enter MAGGIE.

How's the poor dear?

MAGGIE. She says her head is better and she will come down in a minute. What's the matter?

MRS. M. Charley wants to go to Australia and leave his wife. He's *told* us so.

CHARLEY. Well, suppose it was true, wouldn't it be better than going without telling you? But it isn't true.

MASSEY. Do you want to take Lil with you?

CHARLEY. How could I?

Enter LILY—*all mutter words of encouragement. General movement towards her. Everybody offers chairs in sympathy. She sits by her father.*

CHARLEY. Look here now, just listen! It's quite

true I want to go. I want to do as Tennant's done, chuck everything and try my luck in the Colonies. As soon as I had a fair start Lil would come out.

MASSEY. [*interrupting.*] Yes, and suppose you failed? You should have thought of that before you married. You can't run off when you like when you've a wife.

CHARLEY. [*excitedly.*] But why not?

MRS. M. [*interrupting.*] Why not?—just hear him.

CHARLEY. It's that I'm just sick of the office and the grind every week and no change!—nothing new, nothing happening. Why, I haven't seen anything of the world. I just settled down to it—why?—just because other chaps do, because it's the right thing. I only live —for Saturday—

PERCY. So do I!—so does everybody!

CHARLEY. But they shouldn't—

PERCY. You don't mean to suggest, I hope, that we ought to *like* our work, do you?

MASSEY. Do you suppose I like plumbing? Do you think I ever did? No, but I stuck to it, and now look at me, got a nice little bit in the bank and bought my own house. [*looks proudly round.*] Of course, I hated it, just as you do.

MAGGIE. Then why didn't you try something else, Daddy?

MASSEY. I like that! What could I do? I was taught plumbing. We don't have choice. Your grandfather put me to it, and of course I stuck to it.

MAGGIE. But why didn't you ask for a choice?

MASSEY. Me! Why should I do such a thing? Father was a plumber, and if it was good enough for him, it was good enough for me. Suppose I had thrown it up and gone to Canada for a lark? A *nice* thing for my family. [*To* MAGGIE.] You wouldn't have had the education you've had, my girl. We've got to live

somehow, and if you get a good job stick to it, say I—none of your highty flighty notions. Live 'em down!

FOSTER. [*gently.*] We all have moments of discontent, I fancy, but we get over them.

MAGGIE. [*turns to* FOSTER.] Did you ever have any?

FOSTER. A long time ago, but I'm quite safe now, dear.

MAGGIE *shrugs her shoulders and turns half away impatiently.*

CHARLEY. I never said you couldn't live them down. I never said, did I, that I was going away? I only said I should like to. Did I ever say more, Lil?

LILY. [*meekly.*] No, dear.

MRS. M. But you shouldn't want to. It's ridiculous.

CHARLEY. It wasn't till Tennant started about his going—

MRS. M. I knew it was that man Tennant—

CHARLEY. . . . that I thought of it. But if he threw up his job, I thought, why shouldn't I?

MASSEY. Because he's a fool, you needn't be another.

MAGGIE. He's not a fool, and I wish Charley could go, too.

LILY. Maggie, how can you?

MAGGIE. [*crossing to fireplace.*] Why should a young man be bound down to one trade all his life? I wish I were a man—I'd—

MRS. M. Well, you're not, so it doesn't matter.

CHARLEY. Of course it must make a difference my being married.

MASSEY. Remember your wife's here and don't talk as if you were sorry about it.

CHARLEY. [*turning on them fiercely.*] For heaven's sake, can't you listen fair? My wife needn't go to her father for protection from me? I'm not a scoundrel just because I've got an idea, am I?

A pause—nobody answers.

But I'll tell you what, marriage shouldn't tie a man up as if he was a slave. I don't want to desert Lily—she's my wife and I'm proud of it—but because I married, am I never to strike out in anything? People like us are just cowards. We seize on the first soft job—and there we stick, like whipped dogs. We're afraid to ask for anything, afraid to ask for a rise even—we wait till it comes. And when the boss says he won't give you one—do we up and say, "Then I'll go somewhere where I can get more." Not a bit of it! What's the good of sticking on here all our lives? Why shouldn't somebody risk something sometimes? We're all so jolly frightened—we've got no spunk—that's where the others get the hold over us—we slog on day after day and when they cut our wages down we take it as meek as Moses. We're not men, we're machines. Next week I've got my choice—either to take less money to keep my job or to chuck it and try something else. You say—everybody says—keep the job. I expect I shall—I'm a coward like all of you—but what I want to know is, why can't a man have a fit of restlessness and all that, without being thought a villain?

FOSTER. But after all, we undertake responsibilities when we marry, Mr. Wilson. We can't overlook them.

CHARLEY. I don't want to. But I don't think we ought to talk as if when a man gets married he must always bring in just the same money.

FOSTER. If you have the misfortune to have your salary reduced, nobody would blame you.

CHARLEY. I don't know. I felt a bit of a beast when I had to tell Lil about that.

MAGGIE. [*suddenly.*] If you went away, Lily could come and live with us.

MRS. M. [*scandalised.*] How could she? Everybody would think she was divorced or something.

FOSTER. Live with *us,* dear?

MAGGIE. [*impatiently.*] No, here, I meant.

CHARLEY. I've got a little cash put by that she could live on. *Don't* cry, Lil, for heaven's sake! Can't any of you see my point—or won't you?

MASSEY. I suppose you're a Socialist.

CHARLEY. Doesn't anybody but a Socialist ever have an idea?

MASSEY. They're mostly mad, if that's what you mean. And they're always talking about the wickedness of the boss and the sweetness of the working man.

CHARLEY. I never said anything about either, and I'm not a Socialist.

PERCY. You'll be better when Tennant's gone.

CHARLEY. [*viciously.*] Just you wait till you're two years older, my boy.

FOSTER. You see it isn't as if you had any prospects in the Colonies. Has Mr. Tennant?

CHARLEY. He's got an introduction to a firm.

MASSEY. What's the good of that?

LILY. [*tearfully.*] Perhaps I could go with Charlie. I'm quite willing to—rough it a little.

MAGGIE. You'd help him more by staying here.

MRS. M. He doesn't want her. He said so.

LILY. [*still tearfully.*] If Charley really means it—I think—I—

MRS. M. My dear, don't think anything about it. It's worrying you and making you ill—you want nursing, not frightening. [*This with a glare of indignation at* CHARLEY.]

LILY. I'm all right.

CHARLEY. [*suddenly dropping his defiance.*] Oh, let's go home, Lil. You're tired.

MRS. M. Have you just noticed that?

MAGGIE. Mother!

MRS. M. She's my child, and if her husband won't think of her, I must.

LILY. Mother, dear, Charley means all right. I'm sure he does. Yes, dear—I'm quite ready to go.

FOSTER. [*with the air of pouring oil on troubled waters.*] Well, at any rate, it needn't be settled to-night. Perhaps after a night's rest—

MAGGIE. [*vehemently.*] I like impulse.

MASSEY. I expect you do. You don't know what's good for you.

MAGGIE. Well, at any rate, Daddy, you can't say I have much. There's not much chance at Jones & Freeman's.

PERCY. So you've caught it, too, Mag.

SYBIL. Don't tease.

Enter LILY, *dressed for going out, also* MRS. MASSEY. LILY *goes round, kissing and shaking hands, with a watery smile and a forced tearful cheerfulness.*

CHARLEY. [*without going all round and calling from the door.*] Good night, all!

Exeunt LILY *and* CHARLEY.

MRS. M. Well, I must say—

PERCY. Oh, let's drop it, Mother. Play something, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I don't want to.

MRS. M. Walter would like to hear something, wouldn't you, Walter?

FOSTER. If Maggie feels like it.

MAGGIE. She doesn't feel like it.

MASSEY. Be as pleasant as you can, my girl—Charley's enough for one evening.

MAGGIE *goes to the piano and sitting down plays noisily with both pedals on, the chorus, "Off to Philadelphia."*

MRS. M. Maggie, it's Sunday!

MAGGIE. I forgot!

MRS. M. You shouldn't forget such things—Sybil, my dear—

SYBIL. I don't play.

MASSEY. Rubbish! Come on!

SYBIL *goes to the piano and* PERCY *follows her.*

PERCY. [*very near to* SYBIL *and helping to find the music.*] Charley is a rotter! What d'ye think he was telling me the other day?

SYBIL. I don't know.

PERCY. Told me to be sure I'd got the right girl.

SYBIL. Brute!

PERCY. What do you think I said? Darling!

Kisses her behind music.

MASSEY. [*looking round.*] Take a bigger sheet.

SYBIL *sits at piano quickly and plays the chorus to "Count your many Blessings."*

To which they all sing—

Count your blessings, count them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God has done.
Count your blessings, count them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE:—Sitting-room at 55 Acacia Avenue. Early morning.

LILY *discovered, cutting sandwiches. Ring at door.* LILY *admits* MAGGIE, *who is dressed for the shop.*

LILY. [*rather nervously.*] You, Maggie! How early. What is it?

MAGGIE. I've come to help Mr. Tennant off, Lil. Where's Charley? Is he up?

LILY. Oh, yes. [MAGGIE *goes to the garden door and stands looking out.*] He's been up a long while.

MAGGIE. So the great day has come. [*Turning.*] Is Charley going, or isn't he, Lil?

LILY. [*nervously and avoiding* MAGGIE'S *eyes.*] No, of course not.

MAGGIE. Why not?

LILY. Because—why, how can he? [*Tearfully.*] Don't speak in that tone, Maggie.

MAGGIE. He would have decided to go, if you had encouraged him.

LILY. I *did* encourage him. You heard me last night. I told him—and I told him again after we got home—"If you want to go, I'll never stand in your way."

MAGGIE. Yes, I heard. Is that how you told him last night?

LILY. It doesn't matter how I said it. He'll get over it. Everybody says he will—except you. And how could he go? It's just an idea he's got over Mr. Tennant.

MAGGIE. [*angrily.*] Of course it's Mr. Tennant.

Everybody speaks as if Mr. Tennant was a wicked person going round tempting poor husbands to desert their wives. "It's all that Mr. Tennant." "What a blessing when that man goes," etc., etc., as if he had a bad character. The truth is, that he's done a jolly good thing. He's stirred us all up. He's made us dissatisfied.

LILY. What's the good of that? Nobody can make things different if they wanted to.

MAGGIE. Don't talk nonsense. Hasn't he made things different himself? [*Getting a little heroic.*] Heaps of fellows in London go on doing the same old thing, in the same old way, only too glad if it's safe. Look how everybody runs for the Civil Service. Why? Because it's safe, of course, and because they'll get a pension. Look at the post office clerks and Somerset House and lawyer's clerks and bank clerks—

LILY. Bank clerks don't get pensions—

MAGGIE. I know they don't, but once in a bank, always in a bank. Is there anything to look forward to —and aren't they all just—exactly *alike?* I once went past a lot of offices in the city—I don't know what sort of offices they were. But the windows had dingy drab blinds, and inside there were rows and *rows* of clerks, sitting on high stools, bending over great books on desks. And over each there was an electric light under a green shade. There they were scribbling away —and outside there was a most beautiful sunset. I shall never, never, forget those men.

LILY. They don't have long hours.

MAGGIE [*promptly.*] Nine to six.

LILY. I always thought it was ten to four.

MAGGIE. Don't you believe it. That's what I thought once. You're thinking of the bank clerks, of course. My dear, the doors close at half-past three or four— but the clerks—why, they never see the daylight.

LILY. In the summer they do.

MAGGIE. [*impressively.*] I don't care what you say, or what anybody says, it's not right. And if the men have got used to it, it's all the worse. They want stirring up—and it's the women who've got to do the stirring.

LILY. Whatever can *they* do?

MAGGIE. Lots. It's the women who make the men afraid. In the old days the women used to help the men on with their armour and give them favours to wear, and send them forth to fight. That's the spirit we want now. Instead of that we say to the men:—"I shouldn't trouble, my dear, if I were you. You're safe here. Do be careful."

LILY. You're very unjust. Look at the Boer War, and how brave the women were then.

MAGGIE. That isn't the only kind of war. Is a soldier to be the only kind of man, that a woman's going to encourage? Can't she help the man who wants to make a better thing of life? Oh, what a lovely chance you had and didn't take it, Lil!

LILY. How can you talk like that! What a fuss you're making over a little thing.

MAGGIE. It wasn't a little thing. Here is Charley, with all sorts of "go" in him and fire and energy. Why couldn't you go to him and say, "I'm proud of you. Throw up the horrid business and go and seek your fortune." It was all he wanted, I do believe. Instead of which, he's got every blessed person against him—wife, mother-in-law, father-in-law, and all his friends and relations, and everything he can have. Everybody thinks him mad.

LILY. *You* ought to have married him, I should think!

MAGGIE. Don't get spiteful, Lil!

LILY. Wait till you're married yourself to Walter—

MAGGIE. I'm not going to marry Walter.

LILY. [*struck with astonishment.*] You're not going to marry Walter? Maggie!

MAGGIE. I've broken it off. I did it last night.

LILY. Whatever for? Did you quarrel? You were a little touchy last night, I thought—but Walter is so good tempered.

MAGGIE. I'm sure it's very good of him, but I don't wish to be forgiven and taken back. It was all through Mr. Tennant.

LILY. [*anxiously.*] You don't love *him?*

MAGGIE. [*exasperated.*] No, I'm not in love with *anybody;* but all last week I was thinking and thinking, and it wasn't till last night that I found I was just marrying—to get away from the shop!

LILY. But he was *devoted* to you and so kind.

MAGGIE. I don't want kindness. My shopwalker is very kind where I am, and I don't see any need to change.

LILY. How extraordinary you talk!

MAGGIE. Well, when I heard Charley talking last night, I thought what a fool I was to throw up one sort of—cage—for another.

LILY. But you *are* free when you're married—

MAGGIE. Nobody is—more especially the woman. But the thing is, I shouldn't want to be, if I loved the man. But I don't love Walter, only his house. Now, I can leave the shop any day, when I've saved enough—and run away. But I couldn't run away from Walter.

LILY. [*horrified.*] Run away—

MAGGIE. [*suddenly beginning to laugh.*] Can you see me? Running away from Walter? *Walter!* Oh! [*She laughs, but* LILY *looks very grave.*]

LILY. You don't take the matter seriously.

MAGGIE. It shows how seriously I do take it. Have

you ever heard of any girl, throwing up a good match, who wasn't dead serious?

TENNANT *enters.*

TENNANT. Good morning. Oh, good morning, Miss Massey.

LILY. You're ready for breakfast, aren't you?

Goes out.

MAGGIE. Aren't you surprised to see me here? I wanted to give you a send off.

TENNANT. Awfully good of you.

MAGGIE. You're quite a hero in my eyes, you know, and I feel I must cheer or do something extra. [LILY *comes in with porridge.*]

LILY. You'll have some, won't you, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Thanks. Here, I'll pour out the tea.

LILY *goes out.*

[*To* TENNANT.] Aren't you just frightfully excited?

TENNANT. Can't say I am.

MAGGIE. [*sighing and looking admiringly at him.*] I should be *wild,* absolutely wild, if I were going.

TENNANT. I'm going to chance it, you know. There's no fortune waiting for me.

MAGGIE. That's the point of it. You know it's awfully unsettling, all this talk about Australia. You've made me so dissatisfied. I don't feel I can go back to the shop.

TENNANT. [*easily.*] You'll get over that.

MAGGIE. Oh, I suppose so.

LILY *enters with toast and puts it down beside him.*

TENNANT. [*turning.*] Please don't bring anything else, Mrs. Wilson. I can't eat it.

LILY. But it's such a journey to the boat.

TENNANT. Oh, that's nothing—besides, I've got these sandwiches. [*Laying his hand on the package near him.*]

LILY. Are you sure there are enough? I can soon cut some more.

TENNANT. Heaps, thanks. [*Earnestly.*] Really, I shan't know what to do with them.

LILY. I'll put you an apple or two in.

TENNANT. No, don't—

LILY. Oh, but they won't take up much room.

TENNANT. [*resignedly.*] Thanks very much.

CHARLEY *enters.*

LILY. Oh, there you are. You'll have breakfast now, dear, won't you?

CHARLEY. I'll have it later. You here, Mag?

MAGGIE. Of course. Do you think this great event could go off without me?

LILY *and* MAGGIE *go out.*

TENNANT. [*smilingly.*] Miss Massey seems to think it's a sort of picnic.

CHARLEY. [*absently.*] Does she?

TENNANT. She'd marry well out there, I daresay.

CHARLEY. Would she?

TENNANT. She looks strong and healthy. Her sort get snapped up in no time.

CHARLEY. You're catching the 10.15, aren't you?

TENNANT. [*surprised.*] Yes. Why? Coming to the station?

CHARLEY. There's another just after twelve—

TENNANT, *who has been swinging his chair backwards, comes to a pause as* CHARLEY *comes up to him.*

TENNANT. Is there? I don't know. But what—

CHARLEY. [*lowering his voice.*] Look here, old chap, suppose I come too?

TENNANT. What!

CHARLEY. [*who keeps his voice rather low the whole time, though visibly excited.*] Don't shout! I haven't

told anybody—but I mean it. I want you to look out for me at Plymouth.

TENNANT. But, Wilson—I say—you—

CHARLEY. Don't! It's all settled. There's no use arguing. I've made up my mind. I'm going to leave here as usual and coming on by the second train and pick you up at Plymouth. Don't stare like that—I've thought it all out—

TENNANT. But your wife—your people here—you can't do it. When I've gone, you'll get over it.

CHARLEY. Get over it? I'm not going to get over anything. I've been a coward, see?—and now I'm going to cut and run. It's no good telling *Lil*—she wouldn't understand—but when I'm out there and get something and making a tidy little place for her, she'll be all right. She's nervous—the women are like that, you know—they can't help it—and her people, too—well, they're old, and when you're old, you're afraid.

TENNANT. [*interrupting.*] You mean to go! to-day?

CHARLEY. Why not? Why not? If I put it off, I'll never go. It wants a bit of doing, and if you don't do these things at the time, well, you give in. I've packed a bag with some things—I did it this morning.

TENNANT. That's why you were up so early—

CHARLEY. I have written a note to Lil. [*Argumentatively.*] It's the only thing to do—there's no other way—I say, Freddy, you'll stand by me? It's easy for chaps like you—

LESLIE MORTON *crosses behind sitting-room window.*

TENNANT. [*uneasily.*] Well—you know best—

CHARLEY. Of course—it's the only thing—

The door opens and voices can be heard outside, laughing.

Who's this coming? It's that ass. . . .

He rises as MAGGIE, LILY *and* MORTON LESLIE *enter.*

LESLIE. [*a little short of breath.*] Where's that fool? Thought I'd come and give you a good-bye kiss, old fellow. I would cry, but I've only brought one handkerchief.

MAGGIE. Lily will lend you one of Charley's. But won't you miss the 8.15? Do be careful.

LESLIE. Miss Maggie, I'll tell you a great, an awful secret. [*He goes to her and says in a loud whisper.*] I mean to miss it.

MAGGIE. I don't believe it—you couldn't do such a thing.

LESLIE. [*to* CHARLEY.] Well, Wilson, how is it? You look—

CHARLEY. [*curtly.*] I'm all right. You don't expect me to laugh all the time, do you?

LESLIE. Certainly not. I'm afraid you're still pining for the flesh pots—or is it cocoanuts—

CHARLEY. No, it's gourds—

TENNANT. Tin mugs, you mean.

LESLIE. Take my word for it, before a week's out, you'll be thankful you're sitting opposite your own best tea service, on a Sunday afternoon.

CHARLEY. I say, it's about time you were off, Freddy.

TENNANT. [*looking at his watch.*] So it is.

LILY. You're sure you've got everything. [*To* TENNANT.]

LESLIE. *Don't* forget to write, please—and *do* let us know what boat you're coming back by.

TENNANT. [*laughing.*] Shut up! Where did I put my cap?

They ALL *make a rush for the cap, and* MAGGIE *brings it from the hall.*

CHARLEY. [*picking up a paper off the table.*] Here, is this yours?

TENNANT. Another map—it doesn't matter. Burn it.

CHARLEY. Australia!

TENNANT. [*looking at* CHARLEY.] Put it in the fire.

CHARLEY. [*defiantly.*] It might be useful. [*He opens it and fixes it with a pin against the wall.*]

LILY. Now we shall be able to follow your travels, shan't we?

LESLIE. The time has come! Well, good-bye—old man. Allow me to prophesy you'll soon be back—remember what I said—

MAGGIE. [*from the door.*] It's a most glorious morning! The sun is shining for you, Mr. Tennant—and there's not a cloud in the sky.

LESLIE. I hope you won't lose *all* your money—

MAGGIE. The sea will be all beautiful with the dearest little ripples.

LESLIE. And if by any wonderful stroke of luck you do make anything, let us know. Good-bye.

MAGGIE. All the men are running off to the city—but *you're* going to Australia.

TENNANT *is rushed out.*

LILY *and* CHARLEY *follow him.*

MAGGIE *runs in quickly and opens the sitting-room window, through which* TENNANT *can be seen shaking hands again and again with* CHARLEY *and* LILY.

MAGGIE. Good luck!

LESLIE. [*shouting through window.*] Give my love to What's-his-name, the Prime Minister!

MAGGIE. [*singing.*] "For I've lately got a notion for to cross the briny ocean."

LESLIE. [*joining.*] "And I'm off to Philadelphia in the morning."

LESLIE *drawls out the last word, bursts out laughing and turns away.*

MAGGIE. Anybody would think you were excited.

LESLIE. If a man *will* be a fool, Miss Maggie, he may as well go away a happy fool. A cheer costs nothing. So much for *him*. Now it's me.

MAGGIE. How many trains *have* you missed?

LESLIE. [*seriously.*] Quite two, I should think. But I promise you it shan't happen again.

Goes out.

CHARLEY *and* LILY *enter.*

LILY. [*wiping her eyes.*] So he's gone. Poor man, I do hope he'll get on all right.

CHARLEY. [*easily and in a brighter tone.*] He'll be all right. He can stand a little roughing.

LILY. It was such a pity you couldn't get the time to go and see him off, dear.

CHARLEY. Oh, that's nothing.

LILY. I'll have breakfast ready for you soon.

Goes out.

CHARLEY. There's no hurry.

MAGGIE *is looking at the map.*

MAGGIE. It's a big place.

CHARLEY. Um. A chance to get some fresh air there.

MAGGIE. [*turning.*] So you're not going after all?

CHARLEY. Oh—er—how can I, Mag?

MAGGIE. It means such a lot, of course.

CHARLEY. Courage or cheek—I don't know which. Of course, it's quite a mad idea—any fool can see that.

MAGGIE. You're not a fool. It's the others who're fools. If only you could hold out a little longer. Lil would be all right. She might fret a little at first—but she's the clinging sort—

CHARLEY. But think what everybody would say!

MAGGIE. You're getting over it already!

CHARLEY. What else can I do? I—I—shall settle down.

MAGGIE. Settle down! Charley—why should you? *I've* refused to settle down. Why can't you?

CHARLEY. What do you mean? What's it got to do with you?

MAGGIE. [*triumphantly.*] I've refused to marry Walter.

CHARLEY. [*surprised, but not particularly interested.*] What on earth for?

MAGGIE. It was all through Mr. Tennant—

CHARLEY. Tennant? You're—

MAGGIE. [*impatiently.*] Oh, dear, NO. I'm not pining for him. But I found out, when there was all this talk about Mr. Tennant, that I was marrying Walter, because I wanted to be safe and was afraid of risk. Then I made up my mind I wouldn't do that. I tell you because—if a girl can risk things—surely a man—

CHARLEY. There wasn't any risk for you with Walter. I can't see it.

MAGGIE. A woman isn't tested in the same way as a man. It's the only way I have—

CHARLEY. Well, you know best, and if you don't like him—but everybody thought you did. I must say you've been rather hard on Foster. You led him on. I should have thought it was rather a good thing for you. Still. . . .

MAGGIE. [*sighing.*] So it's no good, then, saying anything?

CHARLEY. [*uneasily.*] No—er—[*Turning to her.*] Mag! What would you really think of me if I did?

MAGGIE. What? [*Looks at him for a second.*] Charley—will you—after all?

CHARLEY. Supposing I don't give in—supposing I did go—

MAGGIE. Do you mean it?

CHARLEY. Are you sure about Lil—I'm ready to throw up everything—

MAGGIE. I would look after her—she would be all right in a week—I would do anything—

CHARLEY. But if I go it must be at once—at once, you understand.

MAGGIE. Yes, yes. . . .

CHARLEY. And if Lil thinks me a brute beast for leaving her like this—in this way—you'll explain—you'll stick up for me—

MAGGIE. This way? I don't—

CHARLEY. I'm going to-day, Mag. I've arranged everything. I couldn't stand it. I had to go. I've written to Lil. She'll be all right for money—I've thought of that and I shall soon send for her. I know I shall, and then she'll be glad I did it. I look a brute, but, Mag, it's got to be. [*Postman's knock on front door.*] Hush! Here comes Lil—don't breathe a word—

MAGGIE. To-day!

LILY *enters with letters.*

LILY. Here's the post. Two for you, dear. [*Gives letters to* CHARLEY, *who, however, doesn't look at them, but goes up to map.*]

MAGGIE. [*quickly.*] I'll call back for you, to go to the station.

CHARLEY. All right.

MAGGIE *goes out hurriedly.*

LILY. I'm sure you're ready for breakfast now, dear—and you won't have very much time.

CHARLEY. I'm not very hungry.

LILY. It was so nice of Mr. Leslie to come in like that, wasn't it?

CHARLEY. Yes. He means all right.

LILY. [*as he eats.*] They're very nice neighbours. I think we're very lucky to have them.

CHARLEY. Um. You were up very early. You'll be tired to-night.

LILY. These things don't often happen, do they, and I can keep better hours in future. We generally go along so regularly, don't we?

CHARLEY. [*suddenly turning from his breakfast.*] Yes.

LILY. I've been thinking, dear, that we shall feel a little dull to-night without Mr. Tennant. Shall we go to the theatre?—something light—

CHARLEY. Oh—no—I don't think so—

LILY. Shall we ask the Leslies for whist?

CHARLEY. [*rising.*] No—not them—it doesn't matter, Lil—unless you'd rather.

LILY. Oh, I shall be quite happy at home, by ourselves. I am so glad you would prefer that, dear. [*She goes up to him.*]

CHARLEY. I haven't been up to much in the company line lately, have I?

LILY. You'll be better now, dear. What time shall you be home?

CHARLEY. Oh—er—you know my usual—

LILY. Yes, dear. Don't be late. I've got something to tell you—which will please you, I think.

CHARLEY. Have you?

LILY. Would you like to hear it now?

CHARLEY. Is it important?

LILY. *Is* it important? You'll have to be such a good man soon, dear—you'll have to set a good example.

CHARLEY. [*uneasily.*] What do you mean?

LILY. Can't you guess? How dull you are! Bend down and let me tell you. [*She pulls down his face and whispers.*]

CHARLEY. [*pulling himself away.*] What! God! [*Taking her by the arms.*]

CHARLEY. [*turning away a second, and then turning back.*] Is that true?

LILY. Yes, dear.

CHARLEY. Lil—I. . . .

LILY. You *are* pleased! But of course you are.

CHARLEY. Of course, dear.

LILY. Isn't it lovely to think of! And can't you imagine mother as grandmamma! Won't she be a fuss! Why, you're quite overcome. There! Go away and get ready. You didn't open your letters. There's the door. I suppose it's Maggie back.

LIL *goes out, and re-enters a moment after with* MAGGIE.

They meet CHARLEY *going out, and* MAGGIE, *looking at him almost stops him.*

MAGGIE. What have you been saying to Charley, Lil?

LILY. Why?

MAGGIE. I thought he looked a little—upset. . . .

LILY. He is rather. He's quite overcome, in fact. But then he would be, of course.

MAGGIE *closes door, still looking at* LILY.

MAGGIE. What about?

LILY. What could I tell him, that would make him more pleased than anything else?

MAGGIE. I'm sure I don't know.

LILY. What generally happens when people are married?

MAGGIE. That! [*Pause.*] Lily!

LILY. Charley is delighted.

MAGGIE. [*unconsciously speaking her thought.*] So you've *got* him after all.

LILY. [*indignant.*] Maggie!!

MAGGIE. Why did you tell him *now?*

LILY *goes out, a little indignant.*

CHARLEY *enters from kitchen, dressed for the office.*

MAGGIE. Charley!

CHARLEY. What's up? Don't rot, Mag!

MAGGIE. And now—

CHARLEY. Oh, let's drop it. I was a fool all along—a bit of a beast, too—it's done with. . . .

MAGGIE. But—

CHARLEY. What's the good of talking? Don't make me out more of a brute than I am! No, the thing was meant to be! I was mad. After all, a man can't do just what he likes! It's better as it is. If this hadn't happened I should have done it—and a pretty mess, I daresay, I'd have been in—and dragged her in, too—

MAGGIE. If—

LILY *enters.*

. . . I don't think I can wait for you, after all, Charley.

CHARLEY. Don't trouble.

MAGGIE. Good-bye.

She goes.

LILY. You didn't open your letters, dear.

CHARLEY. What are they?

LILY. [*tearing one open.*] About the new lodger—very quick replies. . . .

CHARLEY. [*hastily.*] Oh, leave them over.

LILY. Ready?

CHARLEY. [*moving his neck uneasily in the high collar.*] Yes—this beastly collar.

LILY. It's a pity they make you wear such things.

CHARLEY. I've got a short neck. I suppose you shouldn't be a clerk, if you've got a short neck. It doesn't fit the collars.

LILY. What an idea!

CHARLEY *stands looking at the map a moment. Suddenly he tears it down and throws it into the fire.*

CHARLEY. Good-bye, Lil. [*He kisses her.*]

LILY. Good-bye, dear.

He picks up his silk hat and gloves and puts the hat on as he reaches the door.

LILY *runs to the door.* Good-bye.

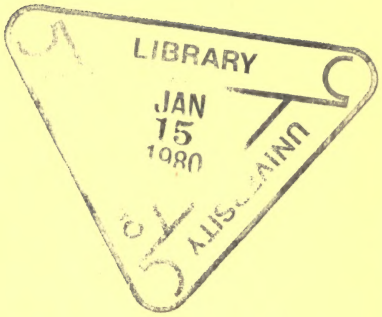
CHARLEY. Good-bye. [*From outside.*]

There is a sound of the front door slamming.

LILY *starts chorus of hymn:*

Count your blessings, count them one by one.
Count your blessings, see what God has done, etc.

CURTAIN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